

archives, Heather Nathans has done a remarkable job of hunting and gathering. Her synthesis and interpretation of those materials is equally impressive, as is her ability to contextualize them in relation to historical events and court cases, enhanced by substantial notes. One might wish that the nine illustrations had reproduced more crisply. An epilogue, a bibliography, and index complete the book.



Gothic Plays and American Society, 1794–1830. By M. Susan Anthony. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008; pp. 203. \$39.95 paper.
doi:10.1017/S0040557411000238

Reviewed by Aoise Stratford, Cornell University

In the past forty years scholarship on Gothic literature has flourished, generating renewed interest in texts once dismissed as unliterary, and proposing multiple approaches for decoding the Gothic's vast body of meanings through fields of study as varied as queer theory, psychoanalysis, and semiotics. However, despite the wild popularity of Gothic drama in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, scholarship has tended to focus on the Gothic novel and its various descendants, with the few notable exceptions limited almost entirely to the London stage at the turn of the eighteenth century. M. Susan Anthony's book *Gothic Plays and American Society, 1794–1830* thus addresses an area largely neglected by existent scholarship: American Gothic drama.

Anthony's book examines a generically and historically narrow body of drama in the context of its production in four major theatrical centers—Boston, Philadelphia, New York, and Charleston—and its reflection of, and reception by, American society. Her focus is primarily on Gothic drama's relationship with American audiences in a climate of growth and definition in the wake of the American Revolution. Anthony makes good use of statistical data and primary sources, and she approaches her subject by listing, analyzing, and comparing the elements of society and of the major theatres' seasons, rather than looking at the Gothic through a specific theoretical lens. Because the book is somewhat limited in its discussion of stagecraft, dramaturgy, and theories of performance, it is likely to interest theatre historians more than performance studies scholars or those looking for close readings of the plays themselves.

The focus of Anthony's study is, nevertheless, quite broad. Her introduction defines the Gothic as a literary genre and gives a concise history of the form and its scholarship, including a clear summary of David Punter's important work on cataloging critical approaches to the genre. It also sets up key distinctions between the Gothic novel and the Gothic play, and posits Anthony's main argument that the Gothic drama in America captured the contradictory forces at work in American society, offering both optimistic moral lessons and visions of transgression and revolution. The first three chapters set forth the claim that "in the years following the American Revolution, . . . [people] wrestled with questions of equality, cultural dependence, and national identity, and these tensions were

played out in the theatres” (16). Anthony provides helpful background on population and economic growth, and then analyzes audience demographics, theatre repertoires, censorship, and the influence of British theatre on the fledgling American stage. Chapters 4 and 5 shift focus to the theatrical characterization of gender roles in Gothic drama, examining the sexually transgressive villain, the self-restrained hero, and the independent yet submissive heroine within the context of moral instruction and social identity. Chapter 6 considers how playing Gothic heroines impacted the careers and lives of four American actresses. Chapter 7 compares the evolutions of British and American spectacle as wild exteriors and processions rose in popularity, and Chapter 8 considers the changing relationship between the Gothic heroine and space—a helpful addition to existing work by feminist and psychoanalytical scholarship on Gothic novels. Chapter 9 gives a clearly structured comparison of several British Gothic plays and their American adaptations, and Chapter 10 returns to some of the themes set out in Chapter 3 by addressing the critical reception of these plays.

Gothic drama in America, as in Britain, held an important but ambiguous position in the theatre and culture of its day as a form wildly popular with audiences yet greatly disdained by critics—a contradiction that is almost a hallmark of the genre in all its forms. Anthony offers a useful consideration of how the duality of appeal and criticism reflects a specifically American theatre and culture. Her book raises interesting questions about the formation of an American theatrical identity that struggled both to emulate and to reject its English roots, as illustrated by the importation of English scene designers and actors and the modification of plays for more emphasis on God and virtue, and less emphasis on the evils of aristocracy. Comparisons between American Gothic and its European counterparts are especially well illustrated in some of Anthony’s later chapters. Also of particular interest is the charting of symbiotic changes in audience taste and dramatic representation. Spectacle for a while became important to the form, but not all Gothic dramas relied heavily on parades and elaborate interiors and landscapes, suggesting that the Gothic found a way to cater to varied audience taste. Although Anthony’s comparative examination of legitimate theatre during the period is brief, she makes a convincing case for American Gothic drama as a form that balanced a taste for spectacle and terror with the reinforcement of moral principles and optimism of melodrama, and the interest in characterization, plot, and acting found in serious drama and tragedy.

Anthony offers meticulous and detailed research of primary sources, and her appendices help place the economics of theatre production and audience attendance in context by providing details of wage earning and the comparative cost of other items, then and now. However, only one of the seven appendices actually addresses plays. The book has few illustrations, and more would have been helpful, particularly in Chapter 7, which deals specifically though somewhat superficially with stagecraft and spectacle.

Anthony acknowledges that Gothic is a term that is now frequently applied to areas of contemporary fiction and popular culture, citing films and authors (such as Anne Rice) as examples. Yet while Anthony’s scope is historically and

culturally specific, more might be said about the imprint (or lack thereof) of the Gothic on the contemporary American stage—Southern Gothic being one of the more obvious offshoots for consideration. However, for readers interested in the history and origins of American Gothic drama, melodrama, and the formation of an American theatrical identity, Anthony’s book makes an original and valuable contribution to an underexplored area of Gothic scholarship.



Reframing Screen Performance. By Cynthia Baron and Sharon Marie Carnicke. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008; pp. viii + 304, 49 illus. \$75 cloth, \$26.95 paper.

Stagestruck Filmmaker: D. W. Griffith and the American Theatre. By David Mayer. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009; pp. xiv + 314, 31 illus. \$49.95 cloth, \$29.95 e-book.

doi:10.1017/S004055741100024X

Reviewed by David Pellegrini, Eastern Connecticut State University

By emphasizing nonperformative elements such as camerawork, framing, and montage, a generation of film scholars has distanced cinema from the traditions it shares with theatre. Recently, however, the proliferation of intermediality, recognition of the ongoing exchange of “source” properties, and new concepts in adaptation and intertextual studies have all contributed to renewed interest in the relationship between theatre and film. Two books are notable for covering the range of historical, narrative, pictorial, and performative coordinates by which this symbiosis might be further analyzed. David Mayer’s *Stagestruck Filmmaker: D. W. Griffith and the American Theatre* examines how Griffith’s cinematic pictorialization, direction of actors, adaptation of source material, and even his promotional strategies, were all conditioned by his early career in theatre. In *Reframing Screen Performance*, Cynthia Baron and Sharon Marie Carnicke seek to elevate the status of screen acting as coequal to film’s nonperformative elements by dissecting how gesture and expression are integrally related to cinematography and montage. Whereas Mayer constructs a cultural history by contextualizing dramatic representation in light of the era’s social conditions, aesthetic codes, and audience expectations, Baron and Carnicke’s work is encyclopedic, surveying and applying virtually the entire spectrum of acting theories to screen performances from different eras and cultural traditions.

Griffith’s career is ideally suited for Mayer’s analytical skills, as evidenced in his previous books on the Harlequin figure in British pantomime and “toga plays” onstage and in film. Mayer encourages the reader to consider *Stagestruck Filmmaker* as “an erratic and irregular and entirely nonchronological history of the nineteenth-century American stage,” developed through a detailed analysis of Griffith’s “pillaging, adapting, reshaping, revitalizing, preserving, and extolling”