

authors addressed throughout, with Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* being the most prominent text (the contributors are mostly American) along with further discussion of Beckett, Brecht, and Lorca.

In her introductory sections, Johnston appropriately resists any temptation to foreground her own critical perspective, and neatly brings together the significant strands of each topic. She sets out a rigorous but accessible overview that opens out the field effectively for those with little previous engagement. In doing so, she brings the reader fully up to date, and carefully lays the groundwork for the subsequent sections.

These are varied in form as well as ideas. Michael Davidson and Ann M. Fox each contribute an essay, providing fresh perspectives on Beckett and Williams respectively. The linking theme is an approach that understands the protagonists' disabilities as real rather than symbolic. These are followed by Johnston's interview with Graeae's Artistic Director, Jenny Sealey, which brings a refreshing and resolutely non-academic set of artistic insights into play. Finally the text of a 2003 multimedia performance art piece by Terry Galloway, M. Shane Grant, Ben Gunter, and Carrie Sandahl allows the writer-performers, particularly Galloway and Sandahl, to wrestle with their love-hate responses to *The Glass Menagerie*. This enjoyably provocative chapter exemplifies the contradictory perspectives and approaches that course through the whole book, and evidences its timely value for today's students and scholars of performance.

DAVE CALVERT

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*Sophie Quirk*

### **Why Stand-Up Matters:**

#### **How Comedians Manipulate and Influence**

London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015.

256 p. £21.99.

ISBN: 978-1-4725-7892-1.

This book is insulated from some of the accusations of pointless research into frivolity that often dog those working in the growing field of comedy studies, because Quirk researches comedy's political and social effects. Her book gives many powerful illustrations of how and why stand-up should be taken more seriously. She examines the way comedians achieve comic licence and – from the left-wing activist comedy of Mark Thomas to the racist comedy of Kevin Bloody Wilson – use the bonding power of laughter to manipulate an audience into a comedic consensus which can then influence hearts and minds.

As well as clear and compelling descriptions of comedy performances, Quirk has interviewed several comedians about their persuasive tech-

niques. This is still an under-documented field, as she points out, and comedians' vast knowledge about their craft is a valuable resource. Perhaps the balance is tipped to interviews with consciously innovative comedians like Stewart Lee and Mark Thomas away from the resistant possibilities in the mainstream of comedy. Stewart Lee is quoted as saying: 'I think most people, sadly, like to see their own opinions bounced back at them, and that's why people like [Michael] McIntyre do so well.'

There is not necessarily an unbreachable gap between the political and the popular, and I would argue that it would be a mistake to underestimate the resistant possibilities of, for example, Sarah Millican, who is explicitly challenging dominant narratives around what women should be and look like, as much as more 'alternative' comics like Josie Long whose routine where she draws a sea scene on her stomach is described in the book as an example of positive challenge through joking.

Quirk concludes that comedians can act as 'change agents' who confirm or disrupt stereotypes, disseminate information, and alter opinions, and that 'The contribution of any one gig or any one comedian, may be subtle and incremental but this is not the same as being trivial.' As modern comedy and humour studies build on the legacies of Aristotle and Freud, there is a need for approaches such as Quirk's. It takes a wide-ranging socio-psychological approach, which is nonetheless firmly rooted in a drama and performance perspective. Hopefully this too may have a subtle and incremental, but not trivial, impact on academic research and teaching which will see the fascinating art of stand-up finally being taken more seriously.

KATE FOX

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*Carrie J. Preston*

### **Learning to Kneel: Noh, Modernism, and Journeys in Teaching**

New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.

352 p. £26.

ISBN 978-0-231-54429-0.

Carrie J. Preston has produced a book on an ostensibly niche topic – Japanese Noh theatre – that in fact should be required reading for a very broad range of students and scholars. Preston traces the influence of Noh theatre on some of European modernism's most prominent names: Ezra Pound, W. B. Yeats, Bertolt Brecht, Benjamin Britten, and Samuel Beckett. Along the way she recovers less familiar names – Itō Michio, Ozu Yasujir, and William Plomer – and makes a strong case for their relevance to our understanding of transnational modernism.

The greatest strength of *Learning to Kneel* is the interdisciplinarity of both its subject and its methodology. Preston explores historical, modernist, and contemporary Noh theatre, Pound's poetry, Yeats's and Beckett's plays, Itō's choreography, Ozu Yasujir's cinema, and Britten and Plomer's musical scores. Also included are reflections on university teaching, dance and performance training, liberal ideas of agency and submission, and gender and queer performativity. The text itself makes bold and successful use of intermedial resources: as well as photographs throughout the book, Preston provides a link to online clips demonstrating the dances and performances that she discusses, ranging from Itō's *Pizzicati* to her own performances of Noh choreography.

Preston is a skilled storyteller as well as a scholar. *Learning to Kneel* includes accounts of her own journeys to Japan to be trained in Noh performance, and the resultant impact on her university teaching. Recollections of the physical pain and submission involved in Noh lead into accounts of her own teaching practice and exploration of unconscious training in submission and subversion in Western universities with her own graduate students.

However, she is as self-reflexive and self-conscious in her storytelling as in her scholarship, 'wary' of the 'comforting story' we might choose to construct when dealing with cross-cultural exchange. *Learning to Kneel* offers a nuanced perspective of Japanese-European-American encounters that reaches beyond easy accusations of orientalism and appropriation, while remaining alert to their danger. Preston emphasizes the value of creative failure and 'misrecognition' in attempts at cultural exchange, from Pound's error-laden but enormously generative engagement with Noh theatre to her own self-conscious encounter with Noh performance as a white Western woman. Scholars of Noh and Japanese theatre will be grateful for this important text, but so too will be those interested in European and American modernism, theatre and performance theory, pedagogy, and theories of agency, submission, and subversion.

HANNAH SIMPSON

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*Alex Mermikides and Gianna Bouchard, ed.*

**Performance and the Medical Body**

London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2016.

288 p. £76.50.

ISBN: 978-1-4725-7078-9.

In Helen Pynor's and Peta Clancy's (literally) immersive performance piece, *The Body is a Big Place*, a group of transplant donors, recipients, and family members meet underwater in a swimming

pool. The piece actualizes relationships between donors, recipients, and wider social networks in a way that is relatively neglected or even ignored within biomedical research and clinical practice. It is one of many recent performance pieces discussed in this edited collection, and exemplifies a mode of curious yet critical exploration of the medicalized human body that emerges in diverse forms within the book's chapters. Pynor and Clancy's performance piece also takes a stance that is shared by several other authors and artists represented in the collection by making bodies perform in ways that echo but also subvert biomedical modes of performance.

*Performance and the Medical Body* is the latest in Methuen's 'Performance and Science: Interdisciplinary Dialogues' series and constitutes a dialogue between disciplines that is both critical and imaginative. A key rationale for the volume is the editors' observation that there has been a recent surge of interest in medicine within theatre and performance practice.

In the introduction, Mermikides and Bouchard provide a useful mapping of practices centred on but not restricted to the UK, articulating how the medical body has become a significant site of exploration across a range of forms of theatre and performance. Pynor's chapter sits alongside contributions by Gabriella Giannachi, Alex Mermikides, Suzy Willson, Gianna Bouchard, Martin O'Brien, Solomon Lennox and Fiona Pettit, Brian Lobel, Petra Kupperts, and Emma Brodzinski that together offer a rich documentation and critical vocabulary for understanding this range of practice.

This context within contemporary practice is historicized by Kirsten Shepherd-Barr's chapter which looks at theatre from the nineteenth century that shared some of the ambivalences about the medical gaze to the more recent work discussed elsewhere. A chapter by the surgeon and medical academic Roger Kneebone gives a sense of how the themes and practices discussed in the book might contribute to medical practice and research, notably within his fields of surgical and broader medical education.

The central idea of the medical body – a body that is 'acted upon' – is drawn from the work of Jennifer Parker-Starbuck. This key concept is displayed from a number of angles in Parker-Starbuck's chapter, which uses the method and metaphor of the cabinet of curiosities. This collection – itself a cabinet of curiosity and critique – provides a significant contribution to this emerging research field within theatre and performance studies and medical humanities. Its various chapters are engaging and should prove accessible to a range of readers including practitioners, students, and scholars from different disciplines.

SIMON PARRY