

NTQ Book Reviews

edited by Rose Whyman

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B. J. Sokol and Mary Sokol

Shakespeare, Law, and Marriage

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

x, 262 p. £45.00.

ISBN 0-521-82263-7.

This is the kind of book to which those in the know turn when they need to apply historical knowledge properly to a point of interpretation in literature or drama. One a legal academic and the other a literary academic, the Sokols have previously published the indispensable dictionary of *Shakespeare's Legal Language*, putting everything in A-Z order. This book takes as its focus the area of law that most affected most people in Shakespeare's time – i.e., marriage – and it moves chapter by chapter through the (usually chronological) stages of courtship, endowment, spousal, solemnization, divorce, and death, to indicate the rules, rights, rituals, and obligations governing them.

There are many surprises. Despite contemporary disquiet about it, spousal required nothing more than the individuals' honest declaration of consent. Consummation and solemnization were desirable but not essential, and hence, according to English law, Ferdinand and Miranda actually get themselves fully married ('MIRANDA My husband then? / FERDINAND Ay.' III, i, 88–9) in the middle of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Almost everything in Shakespeare is done according to English law, or a dramatic extrapolation of it, and the Sokols uncover a stream of legal allusions previously unnoticed. The reasons for wanting to marry given by the clown Lavatch to Countess Roussillon are, in their order and meaning, a parody of the reasons for the existence of the honourable estate given in the Elizabethan Prayer Book (*All's Well that Ends Well*, I, iii, 28–55).

To understand Shakespeare it is worth knowing that he used the word 'dower' three different ways. These were the correct way (a widow's right to a one-third share of her deceased husband's property), and two wrong ways: pre-marital payment to a groom by the bride's family (properly called dowry), and a counter-arrangement made to provide for a widow while preventing her from claiming dower (properly called jointure). To demonstrate how such things matter, the Sokols show that Petruccio's offer that Katherine may, upon his death, claim dower (*The Taming of the Shrew*, II, i, 123–5) is considerably more valuable than the mere jointures offered by her younger

sister's suitors; such (eccentric?) generosity would have impressed the first audiences.

Those editing and commenting upon Shakespeare's texts will benefit from the scrupulously scholarly distinctions that the book provides, and so will anyone wanting to mount performances that get right the meanings and associations of legal terms and events concerning marriage in the plays. The book will in fact find readers among all who seriously appreciate Shakespeare – or indeed Renaissance literature – because the Sokols' immense learning is conveyed in unambiguous and graceful prose.

GABRIEL EGAN

DOI: 10.1017/S0266464X05220092

Jonathan Holmes

Merely Players?

Actors' Accounts of Performing Shakespeare

London; New York: Routledge, 2004. £18.99.

ISBN 0-415-31958-7.

A book that analyzes other books in which actors, often in response to an academic interviewer, describe their art, might seem doubly parasitic upon a moment of performance that grows ever more distant. Jonathan Holmes avoids that danger by being unusually sensitive to methodological matters and by relating the testimony of present-day practitioners to the words of their historical predecessors.

The contemporary material is certainly readily available, in particular from *The Players of Shakespeare* series which has now been going for nearly twenty years, edited in that time by Philip Brockbank, Russell Jackson, and Robert Smallwood; and the growing number of autobiographical works, including those written by Antony Sher, Simon Callow, and Harriet Walter. By allowing for the range and diversity of understanding even among actors who share similar backgrounds, Holmes manages to go further than William Worthen, whose *Shakespeare and the Authenticity of Performance* (1997) was the first serious treatment of the field.

There are four chapters in all; a study of the 'problem of character', which looks at the potential conflicts between the Stanislavskian principles which are widespread in the profession and the arbitrary and unsystematized practice that seems to have operated in the early modern period; a study of historical precedents based largely on Lady Macbeth, which refers back to Siddons and

Terry; a discrete chapter on the genealogical preconceptions with which actors approached the role of Hamlet; and finally an examination of the ideological presumptions underpinning feminist interpretations, focused mainly upon Carol Rutter's ground-breaking *Clamorous Voices* (1988).

Inevitably, each chapter raises more issues than it can easily account for, and Holmes has a tendency to resort to a colourless and repetitive theoretical language when he needs to hold everything together. All in all, however, he succeeds in teasing out the problems underlying the interview format while retaining our faith in the unique value of what actors have to say and, rather more surprisingly, in the capacity of academics for constructive listening.

JOHN STOKES

DOI: 10.1017/S0266464X05230099

Maria Shevtsova

**Dodin and the Maly Drama Theatre:
Process to Performance**

London: Routledge, 2004. 231 p. £25.00.
ISBN 0-415-33462-4.

With a pithy foreword by actor Simon Callow, this is a fascinating contribution to contemporary theatre studies – both with regard to Russian theatre practice and to the more general understanding of process into performance, and politics into theatre. Maria Shevtsova traces the innovative work of Lev Dodin and the Maly Drama Theatre through the 1980s and 1990s rigorously and effectively.

The book is divided into three parts: 'Part One: The Maly in Context' includes an overview of social and political change in Russia in the late twentieth century, with an analysis of *glasnost* and *perestroika* and of the Maly Theatre's profound effect on Britain and Europe during the tours of their epic productions. Through this assessment, we sense a dialogue both between theatre and its political context, and between the cultures of Eastern and Western Europe at a time of immense social change.

Part One also includes what was (for me) perhaps the most interesting and useful section of the book, where Shevtsova analyzes Dodin and the Maly's training and rehearsal processes. Drawing on personal interviews and observation of the work over a number of years, Shevtsova paints an inspiring picture of the philosophical, moral, cultural and social values underpinning the company's ethos. Her personal contact with the material creates an immediacy in her descriptions which is fascinating for the general readership and particularly enlightening for actors and directors.

'Part Two: The Major Productions' is a dense and detailed account of three aspects of Dodin's work: pieces built around adaptations of novels,

the student work of the awesome productions *Gaudeamus* and *Claustrophobia*, and Dodin's fascinating interpretations of Chekhov. Detailed though they are, Shevtsova's descriptions are always accessible and never dry.

In 'Part Three: Dodin at the Opera', I sensed the passing of the baton from Stanislavsky's own work on opera in the latter stages of his life to Dodin's contemporary work. This section includes an insightful summary of Shevtsova's own log-book of the last two weeks of rehearsal on his production of *The Queen of Spades*.

All in all, this is a significant book on an immensely important and influential theatre company of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century: it provides vital and inspiring reading for Russian scholars as well as for the theatre studies readership in general.

BELLA MERLIN

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Francesca T. Royster

**Becoming Cleopatra:
the Shifting Image of an Icon**

New York; London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
285 p. £14.99.
ISBN 1-4039-6109-3.

This highly readable book would be of interest to students and researchers in performance, film, and related disciplines. Essentially interdisciplinary, Royster's book is styled an 'anti-genealogy' of the use of Cleopatra as an icon of dangerous and destabilizing otherness. In Part One, 'Cleopatra and the White Imaginary', she discusses Shakespeare's use of Cleopatra, the interest of early film in the Cleopatra story, and Elizabeth Taylor's performance in *Cleopatra* (1963).

In Part Two, 'Cleopatra and the African-American Counter-Narrative', Royster examines the appropriation of Cleopatra as an icon of female strength and otherness from Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1900), the blaxploitation film *Cleopatra Jones* (1973), and Queen Latifah's role as Cleo in the film *Set It Off* (1996). Royster concludes with a personal epilogue describing her own visit to the Chicago Field Museum's exhibition *Cleopatra of Egypt: from History to Myth* (2001).

Royster makes it clear that she is not taking part in the debate about Cleopatra's race, but is examining how the icon of Cleopatra functions as a performative of gender and racial identity for twentieth- and twenty-first-century audiences. Her 'anti-genealogy' maps strategic appropriations of the icon that is Cleopatra in the hands of playwrights, film-makers, and performers. Her argument is that Cleopatra is the ultimate figure of becoming, and therefore symbolizes invention while still always in the process of formation. She argues that the appropriation of Cleopatra high-

lights the constructedness of racial and gender identity at moments of crisis and change.

This book is wide-ranging, tackling an eclectic gathering of representations and appropriations across five centuries. Royster inevitably maps a certain logical progression of the forms of the use of Cleopatra as an icon, but does not produce a coherent argument theorizing the various appropriations – nor was this her aim. The achievement of this book is that in dipping into a variety of images, forms, and genres she has raised many questions reflecting contemporary concerns about identity, being female, and being other. By locating these questions in the use of the icon of the instantly recognizable Ancient Egyptian Queen this book foregrounds the instrumental nature of references to Cleopatra in centuries of western representations.

CATHERINE MCLEAN-HOPKINS

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Errol G. Hill and James V. Hatch

A History of African-American Theatre

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

608 p. £75.00

ISBN 0-521-62443-6.

At just over 600 pages, you really need to be in for the long haul to read this book in its entirety, though given its claim to being ‘the first definitive history of African-American theatre’, its length is no surprise. Hill and Hatch have collated this study in response to the dearth of scholarly material about African-American theatre, which is marginalized from American theatre histories. Showing the breadth and depth of the work to stake a claim for acknowledgement of its centrality, they have done a fantastic job of documenting the information in an accessible study that offers insights into contributors to black theatre movements from slavery to the third millennium.

Recognizing the inevitable partialness of a history such as this, they set their parameters carefully within discussions of black theatre created by North Americans, touring Europe, and the influence of Caribbean migrants. The history is narrated chronologically, from the roots of black drama during slavery, through emerging black practitioners, dramatists, and forms in the 1800s, on to the Harlem Renaissance, the late twentieth century, and into the new millennium.

Situating the theatrical developments alongside key moments in American social history gives us a way of understanding what has driven black people to pursue liberation through the arts, and offers a framework for looking at the parallels between emergent black theatre and present-day styles. The authors look at a range of black theatre practices, including carnival, hip-hop theatre, minstrelsy, realism, and ritual, carefully

marking the shift from black practitioners performing in white-authored plays to questions surrounding black aesthetics, as more black playwrights created plays responding to struggles for equality.

I could really do no justice by listing what is included here, the coverage is so vast. Suffice to say that there are the expected big names, such as Ira Aldridge, Lorraine Hansberry, and Ntozake Shange, but we are also introduced to many less well-known practitioners, which makes for enlightening reading.

As this is fundamentally a documenting project there is no central argument as such, which makes the narration begin to feel a bit dry after a while, and it is slightly frustrating that some interesting ideas are mentioned but not developed. The last chapter is particularly guilty of this, covering twenty years from the 1980s to the twenty-first century, while cursorily passing through issues as diverse as gay and lesbian theatre, the Chitlin circuit, dance, and funding. The partialness of history that the authors allude to is surely part of the problem, as it is difficult thoroughly to document five hundred years of theatre in one volume. Still, this is a worthy contribution to academic knowledge and an invaluable resource.

LYNETTE GODDARD

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Frances Harding, ed.

The Performance Arts in Africa: a Reader

London; New York: Routledge, 2002. xiv, 364 p.

£18.99.

ISBN 0-415-26198-8.

This reader of twenty-four essays in four parts is especially useful for the undergraduate who has made some acquaintance with African literary drama, but who perhaps has only a vague notion of the remarkable variety of other performance forms on the continent. There is description and analysis of theatre as varied as literary drama, masquerade and spirit possession, puppetry, professional storytelling, concert party, and theatre for development, with the particular subjects discussed drawn from all areas of the continent south of the Sahara, rural and urban.

The extraordinary creative fluidity of African theatricality is brought into focus. Loren Kruger’s essay, ‘Acting Africa’, argues that the inevitable emphasis on theatre as protest and resistance during the apartheid years has led to the neglect of how precisely such a hybrid tradition of performance was created in urban South Africa in the first half of the twentieth century, describing how ‘African entertainers (their phrase) criss-crossed the boundaries between western and African, modern and tradition, invented and authentic culture in search of what they called a New

African way'. In doing so, they drew on a diverse legacy made up of their acquaintance with western theatre in the mission schools, American minstrelsy and on what Kruger calls 'reinterpretations and reinventions of local folk memory'.

This process of inventing or reinventing traditions so as to forge a 'usable past' crops up repeatedly in the essays in this volume, for example in Laura Edmondson's discussion of the politics of 'traditional' dance in Tanzania and in Paul J. Lane's analysis of how the tourist industry has presented young Dogon performers from Mali with the opportunity to wrest control of their representations of Dogon culture from the hitherto dominant elders.

Another area of creative innovation is that of so-called Theatre-for-Development or, as David Kerr terms it, "'induced" popular theatre'. The entirely laudable desire to forge a participatory theatre practice to assist in the empowerment of people who badly need some power should not tempt us into underestimating the problems and challenges it presents, or – as I think is evidenced here, at least in Harding's and Kerr's contributions – to downplay both the achievements and potential of 'elite' African literary theatre.

Harding's description of the development of African literary drama – making audiences passive, frustrating genuine creativity, failing to address anything of interest to the majority – is, frankly, a figment of her imagination; and Steward Crehan, in his engrossing piece on Zambian youth theatre and its ideological preoccupations, takes a well-aimed swipe at Kerr when he observes that, in a social situation that may otherwise appear hopeless, drama in itself can truly improve the lives of young people and give them meaning and purpose – a fact that exposes 'the falsity of the choice between art and education, aesthetics and didacticism'.

Actually, the literary theatre gets attention in several of the essays, most interestingly in Andrew Horn's consideration of Robert Serumaga's drama and in Emmanuel Yewah's thoughtful piece on the Congolese playwrights' ambivalent use of indigenous traditions. Though Horn makes reference to Serumaga's work as an actor and stand-up comic and is concerned with the metaphor of the actor in his plays, his analysis is mainly thematic. It seems odd, then, that Harding has placed this essay in a section entitled 'Performers and Performing'; and in other ways, too, her arrangement of the articles sometimes seems arbitrary.

This in itself matters less than the striking omission, especially in a volume which aims to focus on the creativity of the performer, of any detailed analysis of African acting – that is, involving the conveying of character, usually scripted – as opposed to performance by masqueraders, storytellers, and others (which is well

covered). So much has been and is being written in the West on every aspect of acting, it is a real pity that this volume makes no contribution to this literature by analyzing the terms in which accomplished African actors of literary and popular drama envisage their performances, how they achieve their effects, and what kinds of response they elicit from their audiences. On a continent where both the academic study of performance and the professional training of actors are still in the process of development, it is not surprising that there is a paucity of relevant literature. But one would have hoped that this volume would at least begin to fill the gap.

BRIAN CROW

DOI: 10.1017/S0266464X05270094

Martin Banham, ed.

A History of Theatre in Africa

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

xvii, 478 p. £80.00.

ISBN: 0-521-80813-8.

This substantial volume surveys the history of theatre, in its widest sense, in pretty much every part of the continent of Africa, including North Africa and the islands of Mauritius and Reunion as well as the contributions of African cultures to the theatres of the Caribbean and South America. Not surprisingly, some of the essays are shorter and less substantial than others – Sudan, for instance, not having had the most illustrious of theatrical histories. Also, Banham justifies his decision to include North Africa on the grounds that 'there has been immense cultural interchange between all parts of the continent, and particularly from the Arab world into East and West Africa', but there is too little evidence of this in the essays themselves.

The best of the essays give the reader insights into the wide range of 'traditional' African performance, the development of both popular and literary theatre, and the complex interplay between indigenous and imported forms. One of the features of recent scholarship on African theatre has been to highlight the performance culture developed by and for the urban 'intermediate classes' during the colonial era and subsequently. This is represented by a very diverse range of forms, including the Yoruba travelling theatre, the Ghanaian and Togolese concert party, the Congolese Mufwankolo popular theatre, and the township drama of Gibson Kente in South Africa, all of which receive at least some coverage.

Several essays also demonstrate the conceptual sophistication that now attaches to discussion of 'tradition' and 'modernity' in African culture and theatre. One aspect of this is the recognition that even long-established rural per-

performances aren't static, but may evolve from one form and/or function to another, from religion to pure entertainment. John-Conteh Morgan describes, for example, how, the rural *hira gasy* from Madagascar, even as it has come increasingly to be seen as the embodiment and upholder of an embattled 'tradition', has continually integrated new styles, ideas, and forms, including borrowings from breakdancing and Michael Jackson-type choreography.

My one grumble is that the editor, or one of his contributors, could have done more to help the volume's undergraduate readership in acquiring a better overview of the mass of detail it presents. Presumably, something like this was intended for Kole Omotoso's introductory essay on 'Concepts of History and Theatre in Africa'. Unfortunately this piece is limited in value, partly because of its author's decision to write it largely as a personal memoir, which gives his comments far too much of a Nigerian, indeed Yoruba, slant without adequate generalization to other possible kinds of experience in other parts of Africa; and partly because his comments on history and its conceptualization, while not without interest, are offered as assertions – foreign knowledge and ideas must be translated into African languages; the post-tribal state is finished – rather than as contentious and problematic ideas that need to be contextualized and argued.

BRIAN CROW

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Samuel L. Leiter

Frozen Moments:

Writings on Kabuki 1966–2001

Ithaca, New York: East Asia Program, Cornell University Press, 2002. 360 p.
ISBN 1-88544-541-5.

Faye Chunfang Fei, ed. and trans.

Chinese Theories of Theater and Performance from Confucius to the Present

Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002.
213 p. \$21.95.
ISBN 0-472-08923-4.

These texts make a welcome addition to the growing resources on Asian theatre practices and theories, much of which have previously either been scattered or unavailable other than to native speakers. They operate more as reference books than student purchases, but are invaluable, even revelatory for specialist use.

The Kabuki book is an accessible collection of Leiter's writings. A renowned expert, he introduces us first to actors in interviews that dispel myths that these performers do not work with emotional techniques, a prevalent fallacy that the

collection of Chinese texts also reiterates. Leiter then moves on to analyzing a range of performance issues, from the familiar *mie* – or 'frozen moment' of his title, when the performer holds a grimace or pose for the audience – to a comprehensive survey of the 'beautiful' cruelty which features in so many Kabuki texts. Most were of course written originally for Bunraku puppets, where the violence would have inevitably been enacted symbolically.

Leiter later describes some of the buildings made and adapted for this form found all over Japan, a few of whose origins lie in ritual observance. Finally he includes an essay that compares Kabuki with British theatre forms from 1650 to 1800. The similarities are illuminating and a rich provocation for British theatre historians to think outside culturally located frames.

Other chapters take up actual cross-cultural manifestations of Kabuki in the US, but the book's real value lies in the meticulous anthropological detail about Kabuki in Japan that Leiter has unearthed. He supports this with an indispensable glossary and bibliography, as well as numerous illustrations and photographs, nowhere more useful than in the chapter on complex tricks and magic, such as flying or vanishing, that pepper Kabuki. Such accounts make lively reading.

Fei's collection of translated writing by Chinese scholars and theatre artists is equally important, but is at first harder going – some of the very brief texts, of which there are 54, are shorter than their accompanying explanations. Even with these I could not follow many of the specific references to Chinese history and classical writing until the book reaches the twentieth century – approximately half its content. Here there is close examination of the role of tradition positioned against varying responses to westernization, through discussions of Theatre of the Absurd, Stanislavski, Brecht, and Mei Lanfang, and the presentation of Shakespeare in traditional forms of Chinese theatre.

As a foreword by Richard Schechner reminds us, Mao Zedong's fascinating though frightening manifesto on the social and political significance of theatre is also rooted in a western discipline, Marxism, however specific to the Chinese context the Cultural Revolution was. It is a shame that the book's title misleads, for the last piece dates from 1986. Recent thinking that ponders the theatre's place in the extraordinary economic development of China at the end of the twentieth century (75 per cent of the world's toys are now made in China) would be a welcome addition. But the range of theories presented is still central to world theatre; it is only shocking that this has remained so little visible until now. Leiter and Fei give much needed and highly informed blasts across the bows of entrenched Euro-American assumptions.

PAUL ALLAIN

DOI: 10.1017/S0266464X05290097

Tony Allen

**A Summer in the Park:
a Journal of Speakers' Corner**

London: Freedom Press, 2004. 205 p. £8.50.
ISBN: 1-904491-04-9.

In *A Summer in the Park*, seminal alternative comedian Tony Allen gives a lively account of what happened when he received a modest Year of the Artist grant to be an 'Advocate Heckler' at Speakers' Corner, Hyde Park. Allen, a Speakers' Corner regular for decades, put in the application partly in the spirit of a prank, offering to 'put questions to other speakers on behalf of audience members who have found bigger, rowdier meetings too intimidating to speak up for themselves.'

This is very different from Allen's last book, *Attitude: Wanna Make Something of It*, which used an appealingly scrappy structure to put across a surprisingly coherent body of theory about stand-up comedy and other similar forms of presentational performance. *A Summer in the Park* is structured more coherently, being largely made up of a journal of Allen's Speakers' Corner experiences in the summer of 2000, presented chronologically.

It's an entertaining read, and uncovers a thriving subculture largely ignored by academics and journalists. Allen introduces us to a lively cast of characters like Bob Doom (the ever-cheerful soul who wears a sandwich board with the message 'It's Going to Get Worse'), St Paul (who spends most of his time silently, standing on a milk crate), and the wonderfully named Surreal Ali. Then there are the colourful groups who are there trying to win converts, from the Nation of Islam to the Hyde Park Gays; from the Socialist Party of Great Britain to the Christian Atheists. The life of Speakers' Corner is documented not only in the

journal entries, but also in the introduction, which provides a whistle-stop history of the place, and in the numerous photos, some of which date back to the late 1970s.

There is a kind of theoretical thinking at work as Allen chronicles his own efforts to get back into public speaking, but the theory is less overt than in *Attitude*. Nevertheless, he has plenty to say about the nature of performance at Speakers' Corner. Whilst speaking, he is heckled by Scandinavian drama students, which leads him to define what he does: 'What sort of cabaret artist is it that stands in a public place and improvises a discussion from a casual remark? No. I'm a loudmouth up a ladder in the park. There's no fourth wall, temporary or otherwise. No walls at all. No play. No script. No set-list. No spotlight. No microphone. No admission fee. No exclusion. So most definitely no contract with the audience.'

But in spite of its necessarily improvisational nature, Allen reveals that, like stand-up comedy, this kind of oratory contains routines, punchlines, and standard heckle put-downs. As with stand-up, the key to performing at Speakers' Corner is, in Allen's terms, to discover one's 'attitude' – in other words, clearly to define oneself for the audience, and to develop an appropriate relationship with them.

In his hilarious foreword, Ken Campbell says that Allen 'throws up more insights into the performer's art than any other book I know'. Campbell isn't the only source of hilarity, as Allen provides plenty of jokes of his own. My favourite is a heckle (although not strictly carried out in the role of Advocate Heckler). Surreal Ali has been reading a 'deliberately confusing tract' to a small audience. When they start to leave, Allen berates them: 'No staying power! Slackers! You have to put the time in, if you want to reap the profound rewards of the message. I've got to go now, Ali.'

OLIVER DOUBLE