

mathematical equations and images, theatre practitioners have attempted to utilize and manipulate light in the service of the dramatic text.

There are plenty of 'how to' books on theatre lighting. Some provide a brief historical overview or timeline, but their main business is to focus on the methodological and technical practices and challenges of lighting the stage for performance. Though clearly well-versed in that technical tradition, Scott Palmer has compiled and curated something quite different: a fascinating collection of texts and illustrations that encompass philosophy and science as well as art and technology.

Whereas the standard lighting books tend to have a clear linear structure – in light terms they would have a wave structure – Palmer's *Light* has a particle structure, both useful and absorbing in its non-linearity. One can, of course, start at the beginning and work methodically through to the copious references, the comprehensive index, and, indeed, 'A Lighting Chronology'. But the book's structure, this 'diverse collection' as it describes itself on the first page, encourages the reader – whether designer, lecturer, or student – to dip purposefully into the various sections and 'readings'.

Central to the book is the concept of 'light as phenomenon', and Palmer brings a vast reservoir of knowledge, experience, and skill – as well as an elegant, rigorous prose style – to the complex task of exploring and explaining that phenomenon. Like any good designer when faced with a plethora of possibilities and content, Palmer has made some very careful and interesting decisions about what he can include in some 300 pages. Particularly valuable are the sections where he provides extensive space for the writings and thoughts of key figures and practitioners: from the dialogues of sixteenth-century practitioners such as Leone di Somi, to Nick Hunt's extensive, fascinating, and provocative interview with Rick Fisher.

Light is full of genuinely illuminating surprises and revelations, both literary and visual (the illustration of Sabbatini's ingenious dimmer mechanism c. 1637 is particularly memorable). It should be a staple of any performance-related reading list.

PAUL KLIEMAN

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Bernth Lindfors

Ira Aldridge: Performing Shakespeare in Europe, 1852–1855

Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2013. 350 p. £35.00.
ISBN: 978-1-58046-472-7.

In July 1852, the black American-born actor Ira Aldridge, who had performed steadily in the British provinces for more than a quarter-century, embarked on a tour of Europe with a small troupe

of English actors. The tour ultimately extended to thirty-three months and included performances in more than a hundred cities and towns in Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Poland, the Netherlands, and other countries. At the time, a Shakespeare cult had taken hold on much of the Continent, particularly in Germany, and Aldridge pragmatically offered a repertory that featured *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Macbeth*, along with occasional performances of *Richard III*; he also played the black comic servant in *The Padlock*.

After a few months, Aldridge began to perform sporadically with local companies, acting in English while the companies performed in their own languages. Within a year of his arrival, he had dismissed his troupe and adopted this method exclusively.

The third volume of Bernth Lindfors's estimable multi-volume biography of Aldridge provides an in-depth, thoroughly researched account of Aldridge's 1852–1855 Continental tour. Drawing on letters, archival documents, playbills, articles, and reviews, Lindfors, assisted by an army of translators (twenty-two are listed in the acknowledgements), chronicles this remarkable phase in Aldridge's career. Acting in English, Aldridge was able to convey the complex emotions of Shakespeare's protagonists to non-English-speaking audiences with a rich, mellifluous voice, skilful gestures, and facial expressiveness.

Audiences responded enthusiastically to his performances. In Europe, he achieved greater recognition and distinction than he had ever known during his years in Britain. He was honoured with numerous awards for his acting by European royalty and national academies, including a gold medal presented by the King of Prussia. His powerful interpretations of Shakespeare offered Continental audiences 'new proof that . . . the black race is by no means lacking in intellectual gifts and talents'.

Lindfors devotes an insightful chapter at the end of this book to encapsuled reconstructions of Aldridge's Shakespearean portrayals. We learn that his Shylock, for example, had 'the appearance of a European of Oriental origin', and that he made up with 'a white hawk nose' and 'white-skinned bald head'. Before his exit in the trial scene, he looked at Gratiano contemptuously, then slowly and solemnly took out his handkerchief and wiped the part of his clothing Gratiano had touched, then wiped his own hand, 'finally tossing the handkerchief itself at the Christian's feet with a scathing look'.

The years of Aldridge's Continental sojourn, Lindfors writes, were 'his best years on the stage, the period in his life when he won more national honours and awards than any other nineteenth-century actor'. Aldridge's eleven-thousand-mile odyssey yielded financial rewards beyond any he had known, and for the most part brought artistic

success. A Polish reviewer wrote after witnessing one of his performances: 'The impression was overpowering; though the majority of spectators did not speak English, they did, however, understand the feelings portrayed on the artist's face, eyes, lips, in the tones of his voice, in the entire body – or generally speaking – in those guides of the soul.'

MICHAEL A. MORRISON

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Astrid Van Weyenberg

The Politics of Adaptation: Contemporary African Drama and Greek Tragedy

Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013. 215 p. £50.40.

ISBN: 978-90-420-3700-7.

The Politics of Adaptation surveys South African and Nigerian adaptations of Greek tragedy from the 1970s to the present, analyzing canonical texts alongside lesser known works. Van Weyenberg emphasizes the need to develop a decentred understanding of tragedy's locations, to acknowledge a 'constellation of different yet interrelated traditions', and to interpret the connection between present and past in terms of an ongoing (and mutually transforming) dialogue. The volume rejects essentialism to explore the simultaneous strangeness and familiarity of classical tropes in both colonial and post-colonial contexts, and to identify Greek tragedy as part of contemporary Africa's hybrid cultural inheritance.

The author states that her emphasis is on these plays as texts, but a few moments when her argument rests on details of performance nevertheless feel underdeveloped. For example, a discussion of troubles attending the premiere of Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides: a Communion Rite* is limited by a lack of specificity – what precisely was the playwright objecting to? – and the name of (then) NT artistic director Peter Hall is repeatedly misspelled. Taking the South African and Nigerian dramas under discussion (rather than their Athenian 'pre-texts') as the volume's starting point also means that readers unfamiliar with the ancient canon sometimes risk being misled about the extent of tragedy's engagement with slavery, or its ability to produce radically revisionist narratives (particularly centred upon Helen). The 'double gesture of adaptation' Van Weyenberg proposes depends upon modern playwrights recovering 'hidden aspects of the texts they rework', as well as emphasizing a pre-text's relevance to contemporary experience, but the former point is occasionally overstated.

In general, however, the book offers a valuable survey of key themes (resistance, revolution, transition and mourning), showing how successive generations of writers have revised the adaptation strategies of their forerunners. Particularly

thought-provoking is a chapter analyzing *In the City of Paradise* (Mark Fleishman) and *Molora* (Yael Farber), cautioning against overly optimistic readings of the Truth and Reconciliation process in South Africa, and its dramatic representations. Drawing on Aristotelian notions of *catharsis*, Van Weyenberg critiques the ways in which Truth and Reconciliation has been used to create a 'state-managed theatre of mourning', and argues persuasively for contemporary drama's ability to contest the resulting clichés of closure.

Alert to dangers of self-mythologizing in both European and African contexts, *The Politics of Adaptation* asks not only how tragedy has been used in the past, but how it might be employed in future, and whether our ongoing engagement with the genre might be changing the very nature of 'tragedy'.

STEPHE HARROP

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Sos Eltis

Acts of Desire: Women and Sex on Stage 1800–1930

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 288 p.

£58.00

ISBN: 978-0-19-969135-7.

This is a welcome addition to work focused on women and representation in British theatre. Ambitious in scope, it makes a good argument for a wide time-span for analysis by working a theme across the period in a rigorous and engaging manner. Having cut 'a slice through theatre history', Eltis enables 'surprising continuities' to be 'bought into focus'. So we see an analysis of the relationship between social/sexual policing and women in sensation dramas connected to New Woman plays at the close of the nineteenth century. Similarly, Eltis traces the intersections between legislation and social discourse on gender and agency, and changing perceptions of women's social roles. With an emphasis on dramatic explorations of 'seduction', on 'fallen women', and in places on prostitution, Eltis traces the ways in which moral hypocrisy and gender inequality infiltrated and were reinscribed in staged versions of womanhood and both femininity and masculinity.

The volume is divided largely chronologically, although each chapter is themed, so 'English Decency and French Immorality' is followed by 'Sex Problems and Nature's Laws', which takes us to the close of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century and a fascinating chapter on 'Workers and Wages'. While this chapter retreads some well-tilled ground it also provides highly original treatments of little-discussed plays. Eltis's critique that dramas with 'socially determinist arguments could produce depressingly defeatist