

# NTQ Book Reviews

edited by Bella Merlin

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Michal Kobialka

## **This is My Body: Representational Practices in the Early Middle Ages**

Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003.

313 p. £17.50.

ISBN: 0-472-08938-2

It is not difficult to understand why *This is My Body*, by the respected Kantor scholar Michal Kobialka, was awarded the annual prize for Outstanding Book in Theatre Practice and Pedagogy, when it first appeared in hardback in 1999. By applying postmodern theory to representational practices in the early Middle Ages (the period between 970 and 1215), Kobialka re-invents the field of medieval theatre studies. Citing de Certeau, Kobialka declares in the Introduction that he is interested in 'resistances', 'survivals', or 'delays' that 'discreetly perturb the pretty order of a line of "progress" or a system of interpretation'. This willingness to engage with what conventional history leaves out or finds troublesome is where the disruptive energy of Kobialka's study lies.

The conventional wisdom promoted by theatre historians from Chambers to Wickham was that the origins of modern western drama can be traced to the *Quem quaeritis* trope of the Easter Mass, which used four priests and the altar to re-enact mimetically – albeit in rudimentary form – the encounter between the three Marys and the angel at Christ's tomb after the crucifixion. In four meticulously researched and rigorously argued chapters – what he calls 'fragments' – Kobialka deconstructs this evolutionary approach. He does so by showing how representation in the early Middle Ages has little to do with a mimetic attempt to stage Christ's passion, but, on the contrary, is bound up with anxieties about how Christ's body, the body that disappeared during the resurrection, could be best performed and thus made visible.

Kobialka centres his study on the different interpretations and representations given to Christ's words *Hoc est corpus meum* ('This is my body') between 970 and 1215. Whether in conjunction with the *Regularis Concordia* (970), the Berengar–Lanfranc Eucharist controversy (1049–79), the ternary mode of the Eucharist sacrament of the twelfth century, or the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), Kobialka is always concerned to show how medieval representation produced identities and realities. In doing so, he remains sensitive to the difference of the past and gives us the capacity

to practise what De Certeau desires from post-modern historiography: the possibility to 'think otherwise'. *This is My Body* is sure to become (if it is not already) a key text for anyone interested in theatre history and medieval performance.

CARL LAVERY

DOI: 10.1017/S0266464X04220279

Oliver Ford Davies

## **Playing Lear: an Insider's Guide from Text to Performance**

London: Nick Hern Books, 2003. 211 p.

£14.99.

ISBN: 1-84459-698-5.

Written from the actor's point of view, Oliver Ford Davies's *Playing Lear* is focused on Jonathan Kent's production of *King Lear* at the Almeida Theatre, London, in 2002, in which Ford Davies took the lead role. As the author reminds us in a survey of the many actors who have tried and failed to play Lear in the past, the playing of a part that Charles Lamb considered to be beyond performance is a genuine challenge.

The book begins with a good deal of background information which, as Ford Davies later admits, was written prior to the production as preparation for the role. Brief introductions to the play's textual history and its theatrical afterlives are written and researched well, but they offer nothing more than would a solid study guide. Of more interest are two long chapters analyzing Lear's part scene by scene, with the latter chapter devoted to 'second readings'.

Breaking down the play into a single part is in itself a revelatory exercise; by also recording his second impressions, Ford Davies shows the development of his thought as he prepares himself for performance. But this is all done at the level of the text. One hundred and eight pages in, and Ford Davies has not even had a read-through with the other actors. Instead, he arrives on the first day with the preparation done and the part clear in his mind. The final chapters briefly recount, in diary form, the rehearsals up to the night of the first performance. Although the diary gives rise to some interesting discussions about the staging issues in *King Lear* that emerge in rehearsal and performance, the reader may feel short-changed by having only fifty pages devoted to the production itself.

Reading an acting memoir requires cynicism: actors are 'liars all'; it is their job to pretend to be

other people and misrepresent themselves to their audience. Ford Davies is a witty and accessible writer and has much to say about his own craft. However, it is not clear for whom he is writing the book or what kind of book it is meant to be. As a general discussion of *King Lear*, the book is no better or worse than a good study guide; as an account of a memorable production, it deals too briefly with performance and backs away from answering some of the questions set out in the front of the book.

STUART HAMPTON-REEVES

DOI: 10.1017/S0266464X04230275

*Stanley Wells and Sarah Stanton, ed.*

**The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Stage**

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

322 p. £15.95.

ISBN: 0-521-79711-X.

Historically and geographically, this is an eclectic collection. Gary Taylor's 'Shakespeare Plays on Renaissance Stages' refutes the separation between page and stage, noting the prominence of the acting companies on title pages and adducing this as evidence of their greater involvement in the script's composition than modern notions of authorship might suggest. In 'Improving Shakespeare: from the Restoration to Garrick', Jean I. Marsden explores the revulsion towards Shakespeare's barbarism felt by a neoclassical aesthetic which looked towards the Aristotelian unities and rewrote the plays so as to make them comply.

Richard W. Schoch's 'Pictorial Shakespeare' describes the emphasis on historical authenticity and pictorial detail which was part of the nineteenth century's obsession with visual artefacts. This eventually found its way through to the cinema, while theatre retreated to modernism. In 'Reconstructive Shakespeare: Reproducing Elizabethan and Jacobean Stages', Marion O'Connor considers this Victorian pictorialism to be the style against which the staging experiments of William Poel were conducted, and which have continued right down to the Southwark Globe – with which Robert Smallwood is unimpressed, noting the Globe's 'propensity to pander to the lowest common denominator of taste in its audiences'. In 'Twentieth-Century Performance: the Stratford and London Companies', he charts the decline of the West End actor-manager and the rise of directors' theatre.

Peter Thomson ('The Comic Actor and Shakespeare') stresses the importance of the relationship between performer and audience, though his assertion that Will Kemp may 'have made a theatrical feature of his buttocks' is offered without much in the way of evidence! As well as social and political progress, Penny Gay ('Women and

Shakespearean Performance') emphasizes the contribution of psychoanalysis to the rise of the female actor, stressing 'complex psychological (i.e. individual, rather than socially determined) motivations'.

In 'International Shakespeare' – the collection's finest essay – Anthony B. Dawson asks 'what kind of intercultural dilemmas does the internationalization of Shakespeare pose in the theatre, which is . . . an institution of deep cultural specificity and locatedness?' In answering this, Dawson sensitively rejects the pat notion of Shakespeare as a colonialist weapon, arguing instead that 'theatres in diverse parts of the globe have embraced his work as deeply relevant to their own diverse cultural situations'. International Shakespeare is a good deal more complex than post-colonialist critics would have us believe.

Wilhelm Hortmann's 'Shakespeare on the Political Stage in the Twentieth Century' concentrates on the productions in East and West Germany both before and after unification. While he demonstrates that politicized Shakespeare is rife, he is less interested in productions characterized by 'out-Kotting Kott'. Rather, Hortmann insists, explicit politicization may be over-egging the pudding: 'In certain political situations some Shakespeare plays only need to be played straight to be politically subversive'.

Three essays on geographically removed Shakespeare – North America, Asia and Africa – complete the volume. From the title one might have expected more in terms of stagecraft and an emphasis on theatrical practicalities. Moreover, an editors' conclusion, which attempted to theorize the whole idea of writing about live performance and the inherent difficulties of rendering the temporary permanent, would have been welcome.

PETER J. SMITH

DOI: 10.1017/S0266464X04240271

*Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda, ed.*

**Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama**

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

347 p. £45.00

ISBN: 0-521-81322-0.

'Stage properties speak' is the given theory behind this intriguing book of essays in the previously under-explored area of early modern theatre history. Following the same deconstructive instinct that has produced a heightened understanding of the language of costume over the past decade, these authors are attempting to seek a historiographical explanation for all moveable objects on the early modern stage – furniture, costume, and hand props. Using a variety of materialist analyses they uncover the alternate social dramas of economic production, exchange,

and ownership, and evaluate the contribution these 'alternative' dramas might have made to the staging of early modern drama.

Harris and Korda's readable introduction on the existence and proliferation of the use of props on the early modern English stage takes much of its evidence from the Puritan pamphleteers and then moves on to a brief survey of the rise of prop-free Shakespeare. This is followed by two 'histories': the first by Jonathan Gil Harris contrasts private and public property, and in particular the shift from the props of the late medieval guild plays to the assets of the Elizabethan professional theatre companies. The second, by Douglas Bruster, surveys hand props in early modern theatre; how they were employed; whether they were constant across genres, playwrights, and decades; and if not, what differences were produced.

The remainder of the volume is divided into three sections, dealing with furniture, costumes, and hand props – beds and tables, beards and handkerchiefs in the case of essays by Sasha Roberts, Catherine Richardson, Will Fisher, and Paul Yachnin respectively. Contributions from Lena Cowen Orlin about the hidden histories of fixtures and fittings, Juana Green's explorations of the drinking mug in *Epicoene*, and Valerie Wayne's anthropological study of 'woman's parts' in *Cymbeline*, reveal how detailed readings of texts show their dependence on stage properties to portray cultural, economic and theatrical meanings.

There may be a slight bias towards feminist materialism in this book, but the remaining two essays by Natasha Korda and Peter Stallybrass demonstrate the importance of research into this field of theatre history with their vivid depiction of the supply of early modern theatrical costumes – whether from the pawnshop or the seamstress. For anyone who thought the early modern actor stood in a 'wooden O', this book is a must.

KATE MATTHEWS

DOI: 10.1017/S0266464X04250278

*Edward Ziter*

**The Orient on the Victorian Stage**

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

245 p. £45.00.

ISBN: 0-521-81829-x.

Edward Ziter's investigation of how the Orient was reproduced for public consumption in the nineteenth century emphasizes that this process was not only evident in melodramas, musical entertainments, and panoramas, but also in a wide range of public spaces beyond the theatre, including museums and exhibition halls. The book covers a vast amount of terrain – not only the numerous countries considered part of the

'Middle East' and referred to throughout, but also the expanding scholarly terrain that reformulated these nations for an English audience in the nineteenth century – particularly the emerging fields of geography and anthropology.

The result is a study concerned with how the region was defined for an English audience rather than a detailed evaluation of individual theatrical productions. The initial three chapters attend to spatial strategies: panoramas, the staging of oriental romances, and three-dimensional environments on stage or in exhibition spaces. In the final two chapters the ability of such strategies to produce meaning becomes the focus of the book.

Ziter analyzes mid-century representations of the Holy Land, as well as signifiers of the Orient and colonialism evident in late-Victorian drama. He concentrates on what he terms 'scenic fullness' – a depiction of the Orient formulated to instruct the spectator. He describes, for example, the mid-century panoramas which provided the viewer with an overwhelming illusion of the 'real' Egypt, and explores the manner in which archaeological realism combined with literary interpretations of both the East and the developing Empire in Edmund Kean's 1853 production of Byron's *Sardanapalus*.

The study examines the phenomenology of sites in which the Orient was represented, how spaces made meaning for the spectator. Attention to the subject by theorists including Foucault, Said, and – with direct reference to theatre – Bert States is cited and employed to trace perceptual shifts regarding the Orient throughout the nineteenth century. The value of this publication for the theatre historian lies in Ziter's interrogation of how space operated. That museum displays and exhibitions dependent upon the recreation of specific Eastern locations occurred at the same time as theatrical realism was demanding precision in staging and built-out properties is surely significant, and demands more attention. Yet this author's real concern is how these spatial negotiations regulated impressions of both the Middle East and colonial intervention.

This book serves to remind students and scholars of the nineteenth-century entertainment industry and those engaged in broader cultural studies that rigorous interrogation of any representation of the Middle East was, and still is, vital.

LUCIE SUTHERLAND

DOI: 10.1017/S0266464X04260274

*Robert M. Farrington*

**European Lyric Folk Drama**

New York: Peter Lang, 2001. 183 p.

ISBN: 0-8204-5146-0.

This book examines selected plays by Federico Garcia Lorca and John Millington Synge in an

attempt to relate them to what the author calls 'European lyric folk drama'. The concept itself may seem suspect to some readers: it has nothing to do with mumming or related drama which we usually think of as 'folk' drama, or indeed other forms of 'traditional' drama such as gypsy drama, African or Asian drama, or the drama of native Americans, which is often referred to as 'folk' drama. Farrington is much more concerned with showing how the effects conjured by Aristotle and created by Wagner perpetuated a momentum which is detectable in *Blood Wedding* and *Yerma*, and also in *Riders to the Sea* and other of Synge's plays.

The thrust of the analytical method is then further applied to the more problematic text of Hauptmann's *The Sunken Bell*. The problem with this – from a theatrical point of view – is that the analysis is almost entirely linguistic. It assumes that the language can be analyzed and from this the centre of the dramatic experience be found, whereas experience of *Blood Wedding* or *Riders to the Sea* in the theatre suggests that the action is what is crucially important. It is true that this can be connected profitably to the action of the traditional folk play, but sadly, I fear, this is not through the language.

At best, it seems to me that the resort to the application of linguistic criticism to the dramas chosen here is not very helpful to our understanding of them as drama. The semiotics of drama have moved well beyond discussion of what the characters say, and though there are some interesting and valid insights here, one yearns for an adequately dramatic analysis. For instance, Lorca is doing something beyond the merely linguistic by introducing the Moon into his play of the faithless bride. And Synge knows that when Maurya exits 'slowly' and Nora runs over to the ladder, prompting Catherine's hasty, 'Wait, Nora, maybe she'd turn back quickly,' we are in the presence of dramatic, not linguistic, signification. It is a pity that what seems a rather old-fashioned approach to dramatic action tends to spoil an otherwise promising investigation.

ROBERT LEACH

DOI: 10.1017/S0266464X04270270

Philip Armstrong

**Shakespeare in Psychoanalysis**

'Accents on Shakespeare' series.

London: Routledge, 2001. 269 p. £16.99.

ISBN: 0-415-20722-3.

This book is concerned with the impact that Shakespeare has had upon Freudian and twentieth-century psychoanalytic theories and, in turn, the impact that these theories have had upon our consumption of Shakespeare in a global culture. The first half is sensitive to those readers unfami-

liar with psychological theory and begins – rather obviously but admittedly unavoidably – by considering *Hamlet*. Armstrong makes no apology for devoting half the book to *Hamlet* and limiting the rest of his discussion to a few plays: 'a couple of tragedies, a comedy (or romance), bits and pieces of Roman plays, and histories'.

The study is nicely shaped by this focus, and by a global perspective that considers the role of *Hamlet* in Vienna *via* Freud, in London *via* Ernest Jones, in Paris *via* Lacan, and in Johannesburg *via* Wulf Sachs. Armstrong is alert throughout to the interaction between psychoanalysis and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, and the popular dissemination of a psychoanalyzed Shakespeare through cinema, television, and the internet. Aimed at an undergraduate readership but of interest to anyone engaged with the reinterpretation of Shakespeare through modern theories and modern media, this book is a solid and detailed analysis of its subject.

JOAN FITZPATRICK

DOI: 10.1017/S0266464X04280277

Ric Knowles, Joanne Tompkins, W. B. Worthen, ed.

**Modern Drama: Defining the Field**

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003. 212 p. £18.00.

ISBN: 0-8020-8621-7.

The journal *Modern Drama* was established in the 1950s – a time when the terms 'modern' and 'drama' were considerably less complex. Modernity has since splintered into postmodernity, and the development of performance studies has complicated our approach to drama – turning textuality, theatricality, and performativity into distinct and sometimes opposing perspectives on the subject. An academic journal bound by terms that no one clearly understands any more is in trouble, so its newly appointed editors – who also edit this book – decided in 2000 to invite emerging and established scholars to a conference that would consider what 'modern drama' might now involve. This book collects twelve papers from that conference.

The essays are presented in three loose groupings. The first discusses how our understanding of drama has been determined as much by institutional and disciplinary factors as by writing and performance. The second focuses on the impact of postmodernism and performance studies. And the last considers the political, broadly concerning itself with constructions of 'otherness' on the contemporary stage. The first two sections don't define 'modern drama', but instead celebrate the freedom of enquiry allowed by the imprecision of that term. Nevertheless, the editors are careful to end with a grounded, unambiguous statement: their third section boldly underlines



the power of the theatre to engage, entertain, provoke, and facilitate change.

Along the way, we get some surprising combinations, and many illuminating contrasts. Shannon Jackson's genealogy of performance studies blurs the apparent boundaries between the literary, theatrical, cultural, and performative; and Sue-Ellen Case finds interesting parallels between Madame Blavatsky and Brecht. We are brought from contemporary German performance by Erika Fischer-Lichte to Zola's naturalism by Stanton Garner, and from August Wilson by Harry J. Elam to *Peter Pan* by Ann Wilson.

With such variety, there is a risk that the book might lack direction, but each paper is carefully focused on its subject. Many of the essays are complex and their tone is unmistakably academic – but all are rewarding. The book doesn't offer simple answers to the questions it poses, but instead should be understood to be part of an ongoing process – its subtitle, after all, is 'defining the field', not 'the field defined'. As such, it valuably initiates and clarifies many important debates.

PATRICK LONERGAN

DOI: 10.1017/S0266464X04290273

*Jane de Gay and Lizbeth Goodman, ed.*

**Languages of Theatre Shaped by Women**

Bristol: Intellect, 2003. 191 p.

ISBN: 1-871516-78-1.

This collection of essays revisits some of the questions set by a 1980s feminist agenda in the field of theatre and performance. Is there a 'women's language in the theatre'? If women have many languages, how can they speak together? The editors' response to this is to work with the idea of 'speaking in tongues': to embrace the possibilities that arise out of bringing many different women's 'voices' together on a larger theme.

The volume expands on this idea through a three-part structure. The first section, to which the editors themselves and the performer-academic Jane Prendergast contribute, looks at feminist approaches to Shakespeare. This part includes insightful case studies on Fiona Shaw's workshops on *King Lear* and the Women's Theatre Group's *Lear's Daughters*, now a feminist classic in its own right. Part Two moves away from feminist approaches to the 'canon' to look at 'women theatre-makers' at work. There are two contributions in this section: Lindsay Bell's commentary on adapting Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and a brief commentary and the full script of *Fo(u)r Women*, a jazz-based poetry performance piece by Adeola Agbebiyi, Patience Agbabi, and Dorothea Smartt.

The Nina Simone-inspired *Fo(u)r Women* (for me the highlight of the volume) especially picks up on the overarching theme of the collection, weav-

ing as it does four different voices into a diasporic 'story' of the experiences of contemporary black British women. Including the complete text of *Fo(u)r Women* and an extract from Bell's adaptation makes the most of a publishing opportunity for scripts that otherwise might not (given commercial constraints) make it into print.

The final section offers a weave of theory and practice considerations in contributions by Leslie Hill, Helen Paris, and Jools Gilson-Ellis. Paris theorizes on the blurring of spectator and performer boundaries in her own show, *Vena Amoris*, while all three women in this section write out of various experiences of theory, performance and new technologies. At times I felt that the collection needed a firmer editorial grasp or framing – or that, possibly, an improved balance between text and performative texts might have been desirable. But as women's creativity becomes a less fashionable 'commodity', the volume is a welcome resource for an undergraduate readership in theatre and performance studies and its 'sister', cognate subjects in women's studies and visual arts.

ELAINE ASTON

DOI: 10.1017/S0266464X04300278

*Jane R. Goodall*

**Performance and Evolution in the Age of Darwin**

London; New York: Routledge, 2002. 266 p. £18.99.

ISBN: 0-415-24378-5.

Goodall's *Performance and Evolution in the Age of Darwin* describes the relationship between the prevailing evolutionary theory of scientific communities and the sphere of popular entertainment in the West between 1830 and 1900, crossing the boundaries between art and science. The first four chapters – 'Out of Natural History', 'Missing Links and Lilluputians', 'Performing Ethnology', and 'Varieties' – describe entertainments such as freak shows, circus acts, ethnological shows such as the Bushmen of South Africa, variety impersonations, Wild West and Minstrel Shows, and Burlesques. Here, beliefs about the evolution of humans from animals encouraged exhibiting of specimens from lower down the supposed evolutionary ladder, while capitalizing on the animal nature of humans as an age-old theme of performance, while also blurring distinctions between performance and authenticity.

Comparisons are drawn between the lives of Charles Darwin, whose account of the origin of species dramatized the natural order, and his American contemporary, P. T. Barnum, who theatricalized the museum. Iconic images of the period celebrated in performance, such as Jocko the ape man, are discussed, and monster figures described. Though the voices of the children, the disabled

and people of other races who were the subjects of the spectacles are generally lost, Goodall does attempt to indicate their possible interventions in situations – as for example in the story of the Iowan Indians who demanded from Barnum a new ceremonial blanket for each performance of their wedding dance, which they then kept.

Goodall makes the point that performance was often a means by which the Victorian view of the inferiority of other races, women, and disabled people, with its duty of care, was subverted. Of particular interest is the discussion of the equation of primitivism with dark energies and instinctive behaviour, and its wild expression through minstrelsy and the female sexuality of burlesque, leading on to a discussion in the 'Lowly Origins' chapter of a selection of actual performers, as well as characters such as Zola's Nana and Wedekind's Lulu. This throws new light on discussions of the relationship between views of natural and theatrical naturalism. The relationship between scientific studies of human emotion such as Darwin's *Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* and performers such as Henry Irving and theatre makers of the period is also discussed.

The final chapter, 'Natural Vigour', includes ideas around dance, ranging from the image of the ballet dancer to Loie Fuller, the fairy of light, in which there were tensions between the graceful or energized body representing an evolutionary culmination and images of the degenerate body as epitomised by Wilde's Salomé. This well crafted and entertaining book makes a valuable contribution to the history of ideas and will be of interest to those involved in performance, cultural studies, and the history of science.

ROSE WHYMAN

DOI: 10.1017/S0266464X04310274

William N. West

**Theatres and Encyclopaedias  
in Early Modern Europe**

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

293 p. £47.50.

ISBN: 0-521-80914-2.

West's topic is the relationship between two words and concepts which were new to late medieval discourse: 'theatre' and 'encyclopaedia'. He argues that the choice of the name 'The Theatre' for the 1576 playhouse placed the building within 'a web of assumptions and expectations' about its function which were linked 'not to contemporary performance but to humanist ideas of knowledge'.

In the first chapters, he traces the spatializing tendencies which linked theatres and encyclopaedias. Creators of encyclopaedias called the locations for their displays of knowledge 'theatres': 'once the space is established, according to the encyclopaedist's logic, the things within it will

manifest their own order – invisible in the realm of actuality because of the confusion that it exists in – to the experience of the viewer'. Simultaneously, the appeal of performance for humanist writers was the power of its transmission of authoritative knowledge: 'the theatre was conceived of as . . . a device for "beholding".'

In the bounded arenas of encyclopaedia and theoretical theatre, West demonstrates the perceived potential for total representation, the performance of everything 'in the globe'. His book then considers the effect commercial theatre had on those ideals. In the Globe, the impossibilities of merely ordering (without altering) this totality of learning became increasingly clear. West examines the difficulties of controlling audience interpretation, highlighting the essential question of the relationship between staged and real worlds: 'Is theatre, or should it be, a copy of reality or an intervention in it?' If 'the Renaissance idea of the theatre was to treat knowledge as . . . complete, fixed, . . . in short as a version of the encyclopaedic', he concludes, 'then the self-consciousness, mobility, and changefulness' of actual performance was 'nearly directly opposed to the part assigned to the theatre'.

The opening chapters seem more alive with the world of possibilities offered by West's central analogy than his exposition of the practical working through of these ideas in the works of Jonson and Bacon. 'At the heart of every encyclopaedic effort is the desire to marvel,' West comments, and this sense of awe is mirrored in his own engaging explication of the processes of wonder-construction. It comes out through the densely argued examples and the splendid illustrations of fantastic beasts and performances spaces. *Curiositas*, 'the lust of the eyes', which links passion for knowledge to the watching of 'shows', works its dangerous magic through the majority of this fascinating book.

CATHERINE RICHARDSON

DOI: 10.1017/S0266464X04320270

Claire Cochrane

**The Birmingham Rep:  
a City's Theatre, 1962–2002**

Birmingham: Barry Jackson Trust, 2003. 225 p.

£10.00.

ISBN: 0-9545719-0-9.

Perhaps one of the most striking features of this analysis of forty years of the Birmingham Rep is the compact manner in which Claire Cochrane combines civic overview, bricks-and-mortar circumstances, artistic policy, financial constraints, and an insight into the vibrant personalities of the various Executive Producers and Artistic Directors who held office during that time. Part of the joy of reading her book is that through its course

the actual buildings of the historic Old Rep in Station Street, the life-and-blood of Sir Barry Jackson, and the new Rep on Broad Street become 'personalities' in their own right – both their geographic location and their architectural design are seen to exert an authority and influence over decision- and policy-making at every level.

In her account, Cochrane vividly articulates the impact of the repertory movement in Britain in the 'sixties and 'seventies, with Birmingham Rep at the heart of national creative activity. Of course the personality of Sir Barry Jackson gains particular attention, but no more so than John Harrison, Peter Dews, Clive Perry, John Adams, Bill Alexander, and the current Artistic Director, Jonathan Church. Against the backdrop of governmental and social change, not to mention the impact of changing Arts Council policy and personnel, *Birmingham Rep* provides an energetic and pithy insight into the running of one particular regional theatre, while also serving as an 'emblem' of the history of other theatres across the nation during what was both a turbulent and exciting half-century for British theatre.

Brief analysis is given of a host of productions, though Cochrane's accounts never become either too dry or over-simplified. She also gives room to the voices of prominent actors and writers, including David Edgar whose input and influence (as a locally sited theatre practitioner) upon the Rep's creative development has been potent and significant. This is an intelligent and lively read, aimed at students, academics, and a general readership interested in the broader development of British theatre in the latter half of the twentieth century as well as the specific evolution – though, at times, near collapse – of an ambitious and important regional rep.

BELLA MERLIN

DOI: 10.1017/S0266464X04330277

*Dominic Shellard*

**Kenneth Tynan: a Life**

New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003. 352 p.  
£25.00.

ISBN: 0-300-09919-3.

The central argument of Dominic Shellard's critical biography is that, despite a recent flood of Tynan-related publications, 'the singular achievement' of Tynan's life, his work as a theatre critic, remains largely unexplored in print. In response to Elaine Dundy's gossipy memoir and Tynan's own dispiriting diaries, Shellard offers not so much a corrective as a change of emphasis, a shift away from spank-and-tell to a more restrained appraisal of Tynan's influence on the landscape of British theatre.

As one would expect from the author's studies on Harold Hobson and on the post-war theatre, Shellard provides ample description and analysis of the wider theatrical and critical contexts of Tynan's work in the 'fifties and 'sixties. He also makes good use of the Tynan archive at the British Library, reproducing fascinating letters to the critic from the likes of Komisarjevsky, Rattigan, and a dyspeptic Sam Wanamaker.

However, while the contextual material is often informative, there are many passages in which broader cultural history is only tenuously related to Tynan's writing. To take an example: after a page or so describing Princess Margaret and Peter Townsend's relationship as a parable of youthful expression crushed by mid-'fifties establishment conformity, Shellard returns to his subject, noting that 'during this furore, Tynan was away in Moscow' watching Brook's *Hamlet*: 'He made no direct comment on Margaret's renunciation of Townsend but, in his reiteration of the need for drama about reality, empathized with the sentiments of those who felt that Margaret's treatment was as anachronistic as it was unnecessary.' 'Context is everything in the theatre', Shellard claims, but is it hard to see how this type of negative evidence illuminates Tynan's work.

Equally, there are times when the critic's life and work invite unpacking, rather than simply being sandwiched between slices of 'context'. The strange and fascinating psycho-sexual weekend spent at Olivier and Leigh's Notley Abbey is cursorily described, before Shellard offers the abrupt and unconvincing transition: 'The private stand-off at Notley that February was mirrored in a public stand-off between the government and supporters of nuclear disarmament.' This link is not helped by the fact that, according to Dundy, the visit took place on a beautiful summer day' and not in February.

Shellard also has a habit of describing 'misconceptions' about Tynan's work (misconceptions he is, naturally, in the process of correcting) without attributing these arguments to any theatre figure or historian: at one point he even corrects a 'common misconception' that he himself has offered some fifty pages earlier. It would be too much to ask that Shellard match his subject's panache, but it is noticeable that the most thrilling words and passages in this largely conscientious, sober book are Tynan's own. The number of those ever-startling reviews reproduced at length or in their entirety are eloquent reminders that the most pressing task, as Shellard himself acknowledges, is to get Tynan's reviews back into print. After the biographies, letters, diaries, and now this critical study, it is time to let the peerless journalism speak for itself again.

PAUL PRESCOTT