

can nonetheless “reveal as much as it obscures” (187). A final coda follows these concerns into the realm of social media, digital art, and campus protest.

The book’s insights are rigorously produced and articulated, but also nimble and refreshingly frank. Its structure abets its purpose: in addition to the case studies that make up the four main chapters, a shorter critical interlude precedes each. This interstitial material effectively forges explicit connections among the book’s major sites, often bringing recurring themes back to the fore, but the interludes also meaningfully shift the rhythm and tone of the book’s address to its reader; it’s tempting, if perhaps a stretch, to think of those rhythmic shifts as imbuing the text with something like the breath that Grobe describes as animating the confessional poets’ readings of their work. Throughout the text, too, the author offers playful asides that work as a kind of confession in miniature, marking the explicit performance of Grobe’s writerly voice and persona. One effect of grouping together such a multitude of elements—some as substantial as a chapter, others as brief as a parenthetical quip—is the emergence of a wealth of spaces between and beside, as subjects, sites, and perspectives come together in artful juxtaposition and thoughtful overlap. In this, the book mirrors, or even takes part in, the kind of “styled media ecology” (x) that Grobe defines confessionalism to be.

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Microdramas: Crucibles for Theater and Time

By John H. Muse. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017; pp. xiv + 231, 11 illustrations. \$75 cloth, \$29.95 paper, \$29.95 e-book.

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The title of John Muse’s *Microdramas: Crucibles for Theater and Time* precisely outlines its scope. Muse vividly and compellingly demonstrates the ways that very short plays since the nineteenth-century symbolism of Maeterlinck’s *Interior* have offered Western theatre artists experimental spaces to explore the essence of the medium and the phenomenological experience of time. From futurist *sintesi* to late Beckett and contemporary “microthons” (138) made from hundreds of brief works (Suzan-Lori Parks’s *365 Plays/365 Days*, Caryl Churchill’s *Love and Information*, the Neo-Futurists’ *Too Much Light Makes the Baby Go Blind*, etc.), this smart, lucid volume gets at the experimental stakes of brevity without leaning much on critical theory outside theatre to do the work of conceptualizing and illustrating Muse’s convincing insights. Rather, Muse embeds the brief plays he analyzes and his meditations on the role of brevity within the context of several movements or writers’ oeuvres. He explores the spectator’s experience of time but also the artistic process, most compellingly in his thoughtful engagement with Parks’s writing

process for *365 Days* and especially Beckett's experimentations as a director in rehearsal—which helps Muse account for the latter's subsequent treatment of pacing and narrative failure in his late plays (*That Time*, *Footfalls*, *Not I*, etc.), with their “defoliated” (97) staging of subjective fragmentation and linguistic futility.

Muse conceptualizes dramatic form in a way that respects theatre enough to speak for itself about its nature and contradictions. His rich close readings take seriously what the playwrights themselves think about theatre and time, both within and outside their microdramas, even as he also skeptically questions their assumptions about antitheatricality, duration, and boredom. Although demurring from the task of defining a genre or ontologically confronting momentariness as such in rigorous philosophical terms (though Henri Bergson, William James, and Bastiaan van Fraassen make helpful appearances), this book goes a long way toward establishing how crucial these brief “crucibles” have been to modern theatre's theoretical and experimental development.

Microdramas is, potentially, not only a good but also an important book, although its restriction to theatre that takes the performance of dramatic literature as a given restrains Muse from unpacking dimensions of brevity particular to performance art, happenings, dance, and new media experiments as deeply as he might. Muse is aware of how microdramas relate to this broader landscape, of course, but he focuses on microdramas in ways that compensate for their marginalization of nondramatic performance by examining thoroughly the way language, metaphor, and theatrical conventions become exposed (or reinforced) when lengthy plots and character development fall away.

Muse's wonderful close readings and patient but lively accounts of breathless pace point to the ways brief plays can collapse deep history and momentary sensory perception. Parks, for example, “understands theater's capacity to render its contents meaningful and so deploys her theatrical frame to redefine what events qualify as worthy of notice” (155). In one of her *365 Plays*, a character “restages the holey whole of history in less than a minute, and makes the tragic protagonist a representative for those history forgot” (155). Parks of course explores these historiographic themes repeatedly in her longer dramatic work, notably *The America Play*, but Muse shows how the shorter form of each drama, combined with the playwright's commitment to write one each day for a year and their subsequent yearlong performance in theatres across the United States, created conditions for a convergence between the brevity of individual (often overlooked) moments and the historical weight of their yearlong production. Parks's microthons work through repetition, memory, and time as the past haunts and constructs present identities.

Muse's crucial chapter on futurist *sintesi* shows how the movement's brief experimental durations, even when they ostensibly embody revolutionary or antitheatrical gestures, also reify theatre's conventional materiality and formal expectations. (Sometimes this operation happens behind the artist's back.) For example, F. T. Marinetti's manifestos and flamboyant declamatory *serate* (performance evenings) emphasize radical disruption of staid conventions, rejecting formulaic plots, the injunction to entertain the audience, and psychological concerns in favor of speed and mechanization. But the synthetic theatre in practice often reinforced traditional structures. The single gunshot of Francesco Cangiullo's *Detonation*, whose subtitle *Synthesis of All Modern Theater* frames the play's condensation of “the

most reliable formula for nineteenth-century drama: create a period of rising suspense followed by a gunshot” (80–1) as “both inciting incident and climactic action, a dramatic arc closed into a self-referential loop” (81). This short circuit, along with the synthetic theatre’s (highly theatrical) obsession with theatre’s pasts, exemplifies the historical avant-garde’s contradictory relationship to aesthetic revolution, “both its destructive formal innovation and its peculiar resistance to change” (89). Rather than reading this tendency to become “mired” (89) in the very conventions futurism fled as a sign of theatre’s timeless essence enduring even in its most antitheatrical gestures, Muse situates the futurists historically, as a step toward the postdramatic theatre described by Hans-Thies Lehmann as experiments a century later that expose structures of spectator expectations.

The most insightful and enjoyable chapter, on Beckett’s “shrinking drama” (93), offers a thoughtful contribution to philosophically informed criticism surrounding his late plays. Interpreting Beckett’s “epistemology of limitation” as one that “isolates thin bands of existence and reveals their inherent complexity” (107), Muse shows how pieces like *Footfalls* dramatize “the failure to package duration” as the constructed nature of temporality itself, the way “the sense of time as the bedrock of experience is an extrapolation from incomplete information” (125). Beckett’s skepticism, and Muse’s, lie at the heart of *Microdrama*’s central insight. Staged by “atomizing action into snatches of repetitive dialogue or gesture, and by reducing the length of plays to arbitrarily short stretches, Beckett questions the logic by which a succession of instants coheres into an event” (18). Muse extends this spirit of questioning the construction of temporal experience not only to very small durations—the fifteen-minute or fifteen-second performance wherein experiences become distilled and truncated—but also the century and a half that separates Churchill’s *Love and Information* from modern theatre’s origins. *Microdramas* shows how theatre history, too, depends on constructions of moments overdetermined in their necessary brevity.

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America in the Round: Capital, Race, and Nation at Washington, DC’s Arena Stage

By Donatella Galella. *Studies in Theatre History and Culture*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2019; pp. x + 317, 14 illustrations. \$90 paper, \$90 e-book.

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Despite the central role they play, American regional theatres suffer from an appalling paucity of scholarly attention. Joseph Zeigler’s *Regional Theatre: The*