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Anne Basting, Maureen Towey, and Ellie Rose, ed.

**The Penelope Project:
an Arts-Based Odyssey to Change Elder Care**
Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2016. 191 p.
\$24.95.
ISBN: 978-1-60938-413-5.

This collaboratively written book is a rich tapestry of essays, stories, and conversations, which documents a multi-year partnership between Sojourn Theater, the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, and Luther Manor, a retirement community in the neighbouring town of Wauwatosa. The project brought together undergraduate students, artists, staff, and residents to devise a site-specific play, which took place across different locations in the home. *Finding Penelope* is a play that weaves together the myth of Penelope from Homer's *Odyssey* with a new Penelope story, set in the real-life world of Luther Manor. The project engaged residents as actors, researchers, storytellers, and set designers, and was performed to an audience of over 400 people in 2011.

The book maps the project's story in close detail, from the initial conversations that took place between Basting and director Michael Royd to its multi-stranded evaluation. Part One considers the landscape of the project and how it was inspired by an ambition to raise the bar on activities in long-term care. Part Two explores how the structure of the project emerged from the partnership – specifically, the task of meeting the diverse needs of residents and students, and the artistic ambitions for the work. Part Three explores the challenges and points of learning that occurred, focusing on the mutual learning of students, care staff, and artists. Part Four considers a number of 'rewards' that emerged from the partnership, including performance artefacts, friendships, and creative discoveries. The conclusion is a summary of the evaluation, a multi-method process that considered the impact and legacy of the project for each of the stakeholders.

One of the first publications to question the artistic possibilities of theatre in care homes, *The Penelope Project* looks beyond the 'arts-as-activity' model that typically characterizes such programmes in residential care. It is an exploratory document that captures the iterative nature of the partnership and the challenges and opportunities that emerged along the way. Its focus on creative process and collaboration raises new questions about the ambition, scale, and aesthetic qualities of arts in elder care.

As such, this book is a much-needed resource for artists, care professionals, and students who are interested in developing high quality arts projects in care settings. It is also a valuable resource for university lecturers, as it shows how such

projects can be embedded within a university teaching structure, engaging students across different courses in a variety of roles.

NICOLA HATTON

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Joseph Anderton

Beckett's Creatures:

Art of Failure after the Holocaust

London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2016.

264 p. £65.

ISBN: 978-1-474-23453-5.

It is unsurprising that Beckett's work figures in debates in both trauma and Holocaust studies. Rather like Sebald, the atrocities committed by the Nazis in the name of racial and cultural purification do not feature directly in his work, but are an implicit point of reference; the imagined networks of torturers and tortured in the novel *How It Is*, the cyclical interrogations in *Play* and *What Where*, the beatings Estragon receives each night, all speak of a world in which the exercise of power is arbitrary, and serves to degrade both the idea of humanity and the physical integrity of the individual human being.

Anderton's monograph begins by trying to fix what is left for the Beckettian protagonist after his or her humanity has been destroyed or effaced. This itself isn't a new question for Beckett studies; ever since Adorno described *Endgame* as a post-Holocaust play, scholars analyzing Beckett's work have found themselves returning to the painful aesthetic and moral choices made by artists working in the shadow of the Shoah. After all, those who were best placed to bear witness to the Holocaust were those who were utterly destroyed by it. Given that, how can Beckett, or any artist, find a form and style that allows those destroyed by something unimaginable to give voice and shape to their experience?

Anderton's persuasive answer is that Beckett reconfigures the representation of humanity in his post-war work. Anderton borrows and adopts the idea of character as creature from Shakespeare studies; the creature is an interstitial figure, positioned between conventional humanist representations of the self and the representation of the self as animal. This, for Anderton, is a particularly useful term to apply to Beckett's work. As he argues, Beckett's characters exist in a world marked by the death of the humanist ideal; but they contain echoes of that ideal – in their memories of an ideal past, in the linguistic and physical strategies they adopt to survive a world that is bent on their destruction.

The book covers Beckett's prose and theatre; it is a useful contribution to Beckett studies, to performance studies, and to those aspects of literary studies that deal with the representation

of trauma. It is not a text for beginners, but for scholars and specialists it provides an interesting (and useful) way of thinking about the implicitly political nature of Beckett's writing.

DAVID PATTIE

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Vicky Angelaki

**Contemporary British Theatre:
Breaking New Ground**

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 192 p.
£58.

ISBN: 978-1-137-01012-4.

Any work that successfully articulates the theoretical underpinnings of contemporary drama is to be welcomed by those of us who teach the subject but struggle to find unity in the diverse offerings of modern writing and theatre-making. We may even have come to accept that the attempt is dated and doomed. Angelaki's edited collection of essays does not offer a misleadingly unifying thesis; instead it creates a space for dialogue between the plethora of current forms. Liz Tomlin's Foreword offers a diachronic analysis that counterbalances Hans-Thies Lehmann's attempted displacement of the elements of the dramatic theatre, and so offers an explicit revalidation of the act of playwriting. Contemporary drama, she cogently argues, exists in multiple modes. The performative and theatrical do not replace the performed and dramatic: they co-exist and their interactions produce new and exciting syntheses.

This leads to a 'realignment of the text-driven and the postdramatic', exemplified by the writers discussed by this book's authors. Whether Kane, Churchill, Crimp, or Crouch, and whether their

mode is experimental or more recognizably traditional and political, contemporary theatre is enriched by the variety of its methods as well as its subjects.

The European contributors – Angelaki herself, Dan Rebellato, Chris Megson, Elizabeth Angel-Perez, Mireia Aragay and Enric Monforte, Helen Freshwater, Elizabeth Sakellariou, Marissia Fragkou, and Lynette Goddard – draw upon the philosophical writings of Rancière, Debord, Bhabha, Bourdieu, and many others to elucidate their critiques, but do so relatively lightly and with due regard for their readers' presumed unfamiliarity with much of the theoretical territory. The scholars give us an appropriate critical apparatus at the same time as absorbing the critique: examining how different works on the politics of racial violence affect and engage their audiences in terms of Rancière's notions of the 'emancipated spectator' and 'the (re)distribution of the sensible', for example. One prays that this kind of pan-European scholarly investigation of British theatre will not retrench as our academies adjust to the realities of Brexit.

Invidious, of course, to select among the many closely reasoned essays, but I found especially stimulating – and directly useful in terms of future class discussions – Rebellato's examination of (resurrected) authorship; Megson's explorations of the metaphysical and spiritual foci visible in so much contemporary drama; and Angel-Perez's analysis of literary constraints as the lipographic driving force behind works by Churchill and Crimp. Angelaki's book positions contemporary British drama in creative, self-renewing flux, and offers new audiences new ways to receive and to co-create the dramas of our time.

ANTHONY FROST