

In his treatment of *Measure*, for example, Margolies's reading turns upon the somewhat commonplace observation that the marriages of the conclusion satisfy merely the formal requirements of comedy, and that Isabella's silent response to Duke Vincentio's marriage proposal is indicative of our own complicated reaction, which becomes the fissure through which Shakespeare's social criticism of legal and social attitudes to sex and marriage comes into view. If the argument is not unfamiliar, Margolies distinguishes it with fine attention to textual detail; for example, his treatment of the rhetorical nuances of different characters' speech is revelatory. This is where the book excels. Because of its lucidity, clarity, and textually focused detail, the discussion is ideal for undergraduates, which is not to undervalue its scholarship. Margolies provides many moments of gratifying explication – for example, of Shylock's desire for revenge in the context not of Elizabethan anti-Semitism, but of the revenger's role in contemporary revenge tragedy.

Margolies's case for the problem plays is unlikely to change the way editors or booksellers classify Shakespeare's plays. It might also be argued that the emphasis on audience response leads occasionally to normative assumptions about Shakespeare's historical audiences – how they must have responded, for example, to the 'unpleasantness inherent' in Claudio and Hero's marriage in *Much Ado* after Claudio's 'monstrous' behaviour. If, however, the occasional need for greater historical contextualization of Elizabethan audiences and readers is necessary, Margolies's insistence upon the importance of emotional response contributes usefully to a renewed critical interest in aesthetics and performance in early modern studies.

CARY DI PIETRO

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Chris Ritchie

Performing Live Comedy

London: Methuen Drama, 2012. 228 p. £14.99.

ISBN: 978-1-408-14643-9.

This is not really an academic book, instead being aimed at, in the author's words, 'all those playground and pub comedians who are ready to take the next step'. As such, it's the latest in a series of instructional manuals about comic performance published in the last couple of decades. This is a comparatively rare British example of the form (most are American), and it's also marked out by the fact that it covers not just stand-up but also related forms such as ventriloquism, drag, and double acts. The advice Ritchie gives is clear and simple. There are chapters on comic identity, character comedy, performance technique, material, audiences, and the business aspects of

comedy. Some chapters include exercises and all finish with a recap, making this a very easy book to navigate.

There's an inherent problem with trying to sum up something as multifaceted and deceptively subtle as comic performance in a book that clocks in at under 250 pages, and this volume doesn't fully convey the rich variety of creative choices available to the live comedian. However, Ritchie does acknowledge other possibilities, particularly in a section on the 'anti-comedy' of acts like Ed Aczel. The book is informed by Ritchie's own experiences, both as a comedian and as the founder of Southampton Solent University's comedy degree, and there are subtle hints of academic awareness lurking underneath his plain-speaking guidance.

A number of things mark the book out from similar publications. Firstly, Ritchie takes an international approach, drawing examples not just from Britain and America, but also Jerusalem, Germany, and the Netherlands. Secondly, his own thoughts are supplemented by a series of interviews with performers, including Shazia Mirza, George Egg, Zoe Lyons, Mat Fraser, Henning Wehn, Raymond and Mr Timpkins, Davina Sparkle, and socialist conjuror Ian Saville. There's a pleasing variety here, with differences in gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and performance genre. The interview material is particularly useful in a section about the different methodologies comedians use to create their material. Thirdly, Ritchie introduces the concept of the 'microworld', defined as 'the world the individual comedian lives in while onstage', which is built up with each new joke and allows us to 'locate ourselves in . . . familiar territory'. This is a useful way of thinking about the imaginative world which the comedian creates in the mind of the audience, and arguably has value for academics as well as for would-be comics.

OLIVER DOUBLE

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Jerald Schwiebert

Physical Expression and the Performing Artist:

Moving beyond the Plateau

Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2011.

256 p. £34.95.

ISBN: 978-0-472-03416-1.

There are few movement books that capture a systematic experiential study of movement for performers as does this dynamic work. The author organizes his particular approach to movement and somatic training within a practical and theoretical framework with its underpinning in the Alexander Technique, Tai-Chi, and Pilates.

The first half of the book focuses on movement embracing four fundamental concepts: balance,

force and flow, and mind. Illustrated by many of his own detailed, expressive drawings, a context is offered for analyzing and understanding posture, alignment, movement patterns, and habits. Each area is examined in detail, and accompanied by excellent practical exercises to heighten awareness and understanding.

Illustrated by Da Vinci's drawings, the second half of the book offers an anatomical basis for understanding expression and the body. Theoretical background is excellently supported throughout by awareness exercises to illustrate anatomical and physical information. Like many movement practitioners, Schwiebert has developed this body of work through selecting elements from a variety of existing movement and somatic practices; the selected principles are sound, the underpinning is profound.

The book makes fascinating and valuable reading for the movement teacher as well as for the student of movement, performance, or dance searching for a deeper underpinning to their practice. It is particularly relevant for the post-graduate student wanting a practical approach to movement practice as research. As the author acknowledges, there is only so much physical understanding you can gain from reading a book. However he also recognizes that the reader will actually experience the physical sensation while understanding a concept, premise, or principle. The author's calm and passionate voice is very present in the book; he is in the room as we follow the exercises, he anticipates our response and asks perfectly timed questions, taking us through complex principles of movement theory translated into accessible language and exercises. Reading this book is a movement session in itself!

NIAMH DOWLING

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Michael Y. Bennett, ed.

Refiguring Oscar Wilde's *Salome*

Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2011. 306 p.

£53.40.

ISBN: 978-90-420-3432-7.

This, somewhat surprisingly, is the first collection of essays solely on Wilde's 'anomalous' non-comedy, *Salome*. The volume sets out to explore the play 'in depth' and to 'fully consider *Salome* as a part or an anomaly of Wilde's oeuvre'. The essays are paired (with one triple grouping) thematically in 'common scholarly conversations surrounding *Salome* and Wilde's work, as a whole', and this – fulfilling the aim of the 'Rodopi Dialogue' series – enables an organized, but polyvocal reading of the book itself, and more importantly, re-engagement with the play.

The fifteen essays, from established and emergent scholars, range over a cornucopia of subjects:

language, gender identity, Wilde's Irish identity, necrophilia and enchantment, tragedy, and Wilde as a symbolist, modernist, or post-modernist. It engages with the play in its many, often intertextual and intermedial manifestations – drama, dance, literature, opera, and film. Far from producing confusion, this scholarly eclecticism produces some fruitful and exciting juxtapositions. Some are internal to the essays ('*Salome* and Judith Butler', '*Salome* and Robert Graves's *The White Goddess*', 'Death and Tragedy in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* and *Salome*', Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* and Covent Garden's 2008 production of the Strauss opera, and perhaps more predictably, but no less effectively, '*Salome* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*'). Others are external: essays on '*Salome* and Romanticism' sit side by side with essays on '*Salome* and the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s', and a detailed analysis of Headlong's 'raw and alarming' production of the play in 2010.

In the introduction, Michael Y. Bennett defends his choice of illustration for the cover of the infamous photograph of the opera singer Alice Guszalewicz as *Salome* – thought for a long time to be of Wilde himself posing in the role – because it 'in a sense . . . best sums up the controversies and issues of the past fifty years surrounding Wilde's *Salome*' – ambiguity, liminality, opera/play, hetero/homosexual and perverse desire, the gaze – which Bennett wishes to revisit and develop through the book as a whole.

Perhaps best read in conjunction with the more linear 1996 Cambridge 'Plays in Production' stage history of *Salome* by John Tydeman and Stephen Price (who contributes the essay to this volume on *Salome* and *Sunset Boulevard*), this book opens up the play as, and for, performance. The range of essays in the volume serves both to locate the play in its original intellectual, aesthetic and theatrical context, and to suggest the complex possibilities of twentieth and twenty-first century readings and performances of the text without imposing an erroneously singular or homogenous overview on this elusive play.

VIV GARDNER

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Oliver Double

Britain Had Talent: a History of Variety Theatre

Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012. 288 p. £17.99.

ISBN: 978-0-230-28460-9.

This lively and eclectic historical account of variety theatre hums with enthusiasm and replicates the playfulness of the studied form. Oliver Double bounds precisely across the interlocking narratives that nest beneath this theatrical tradition and, like a diligently planned variety bill, keeps his wide-ranging and ambitious discussion