
Stephen Bottoms

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the possible ur-Hamlet and the German Fratricide Punished. The play is then examined in the context of the Globe’s staging means and presentational possibilities, and noted are its likely use of stage areas; ‘fairly extensive’ use of props; and the ways in which, in open-air daytime performance, movement, gesture and delivery could signal place, time and weather (p. 35). Bevington then shifts focus to what his chapter heading calls the play’s ‘Ideological Contexts’, and he tracks through the text exploring key points in the action like Hamlet’s exchanges with Cordelia and the possibility they are overheard by Claudius and Polonius, the staging of the murder of Gonzago, Claudius’s delayed exit, the gravedigger scene and the final bloody denouement. All are explored in an attempt ‘to visualize Hamlet on the stage in 1599–1601’ (p. 52) and assess how the action would have played out given the social, political and religious presuppositions and understandings of an Elizabethan audience. These first three chapters – some eighty pages – are a compact but impressively detailed exploration of the genesis, stage life and page life of the play in its time, and Bevington’s own many acute perceptions are supplemented by reference to the readings of modern scholars.

The remaining four chapters are in a way the more impressive in that they take on the formidable task of exploring the stage and textual history and the critical reception of Hamlet from the seventeenth century through to the present. Notwithstanding that in a short space the interpretations of actors can only be treated in brief, through to the end of the nineteenth century there are perceptive sections on major figures like Betterton, Garrick, Kemble, Macready and Irving.

Inevitably, coverage of modern and contemporary English-speaking and foreign-language Hamlets on stage and screen is somewhat contracted (actors Gielgud and Olivier, and the Russian director Kozintsev’s version of the play among the exceptions), some being just listed by date in the notes – understandably, for more extensive treatment would have required a book twice as long. But space is commendably found for mention of both foreign treatments and those of a number of female stage and screen interpreters of the role.

Comment on some recent interpreters is perforce tight, but twentieth-century and even more recent developments in critical and textual readings are given good space, and emphases are charted through to postmodernism. Bevington’s notes give valuable additional information and the bibliography is conveniently organized by chapters. The book is illustrated, but for me such an impressively comprehensive account as we are given here makes it the perfect companion, at least through to the 1950s, to Mander and Mitchenson’s richly illustrated and similarly titled Hamlet through the Ages (1955).
Shannon Jackson’s fascinating new book deals with what she calls ‘interdependent performance’ – that is, the ways in which a range of contemporary artists and theatre-makers have sought to dramatize their relationships with, and reliance on, supporting structures. Of concern here are a wide range of networked dependencies – from the service provided by immediate colleagues (curators, stage managers), to the labour of sometimes-volunteer performers and participants, and beyond to the global social infrastructure itself. In one chapter, for example, Jackson discusses the way that recent performances by the Builders Association and Rimini Protokoll have rendered visible the reliance of Western communication structures on Asian call centres, by employing Indian telephonists as remote performers.

Running throughout the book is a sophisticated critical analysis of the also-troubled relationship between the traditions of theatre and the visual arts. Art-world discourse is still frequently predicated on the notion of the individual artist–genius, for whom images, objects and other people function simply as ‘material’ to be assembled under their solo signature. From the 1960s onwards, however, artists working in the fields of minimal, conceptual and performance art began controversially exploiting elements of the theatre’s fundamentally collaborative dynamic, and its dependence on the contingencies of time and place. Attention was drawn, in effect, to the stage management of the gallery context itself. Such reflexive theatricalization of art has, Jackson argues, again become particularly prevalent in recent practice. Indeed, she begins and ends Social Works with reflections on two twenty-first-century redeployments of Samuel Beckett’s plays in art-world contexts. The final chapter examines artist Paul Chan’s decision to stage Waiting for Godot site-specifically, in the devastated wasteland of New Orleans’s Lower Ninth Ward, post-Hurricane Katrina. To do this, he brought in the Classical Theatre of Harlem’s existing production of Godot – thereby complicating questions of authorship and attribution. Was Chan producing a stop on the CTH tour, or were they material in his art?

Such interdependencies and contextual conundrums form the core of Jackson’s analysis throughout the book. Among the many delights of Social Works are a playful but trenchant critique of the blind spots in the thinking of ‘situational’ art critic Claire Bishop, and a superb exploration of the work of conceptual/performance artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles – whose roots in second-wave feminism led her first to dramatize the often invisible ‘women’s work’ (e.g. cleaning) on which the male-dominated gallery world relies, and then by extension to document and highlight the labour of urban sanitation workers.

This is a subtle, nuanced and socially committed book that should be widely read. One question I had after reading it, however, was why relatively little attention had been directed to the reception of these artists’ work by their audiences. Surely this, too, is an interdependent relationship of considerable social significance? Yet most of the performances discussed here, for all their emphasis on labour and support structures, appear to have been targeted primarily at an existing, relatively privileged, audience base for contemporary arts. And so, for example, when Jackson notes that Chan’s Godot attracted a much larger audience than its organizers had anticipated, I wanted to know more about who had come. Presumably there
were many Lower Ninth Ward flood victims in attendance at this high-profile event in their neighbourhood, but we are told nothing of their reactions. Jackson quotes the perspectives of the artists involved in some detail, but what of their audience?

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Reviewed by Jacqueline Bolton, University of Reading, j.l.bolton@reading.ac.uk

The title of Di Trevis’s Being a Director is revealing: for Trevis, directing is not something one does, it is something one is. This belief in the innate gifts of a true artist – ‘you did not make your talent, you were given it by an accident of fate’ – underpins a curious mixture of useful advice and wilful mystification in A Life in Theatre (p. 34). An awkward combination of egotism and vulnerability permeates the pages as Trevis strives to weave a narrative of what it means to ‘be’ a ‘director’.

It is, therefore, not entirely clear at whom this book is aimed. As an introduction to the basic materials and procedures of theatre-making, the opening sections ‘Directing: The Parameters’ and ‘Directing: The Specifics’ provide a thoughtful overview of the effort and rewards involved in mounting a production. The chapters ‘Rehearsing the Actors’ and ‘Forging a Directing Language’ in particular offer helpful advice to the director still unused to the pressures and demands of a rehearsal room. Whilst there is much in ‘Deciding to Be a Director’ which makes me cringe (‘At base, you are casting yourself as a maverick in society’, p. 33) again, this chapter contains useful, practical suggestions to help the neophyte director focus and build upon her career.

The unacknowledged focus of A Life in the Theatre, however, is not simply the business of directing, or even of ‘being a director’, but of being a successful director. A self-consciously autobiographical book, Trevis’s references to her own career at times undermine her pedagogical project. Examples of problem solving, for instance, are taken from her experiences directing at the Olivier, the Cottesloe and the Swan Theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon: it is difficult to imagine aspiring directors having to deal with these hallowed spaces too early in their career. Similarly, descriptions of rehearsals often assume the availability of fight directors, choreographers, musicians; proscenium arches, orchestra pits, balconies; costume departments and large casts. Bar fleeting references to Pinter and Brecht (which is another story), the book’s primary reference points are Shakespeare, Webster, Tourneur, Ibsen and Lorca: who cuts their teeth on Tourneur?

Above all, the central section of A Life in Theatre bears witness to the fixity and resilience of ‘Establishment’ attitudes towards drama and theatre: drama is a literary narrative (‘The text is God’, p. 45) of conflict and purposeful action, enacted in purpose-built theatres by actors who ‘resemble’ their characters. The entire apparatus of production is harnessed in order to enable actors to ‘fully . . . express character and emotion’ as though ‘full expression of character’ were the transhistorical endeavour of theatrical production (p. 14). Trevis’s reverential attitude towards institutions, classical