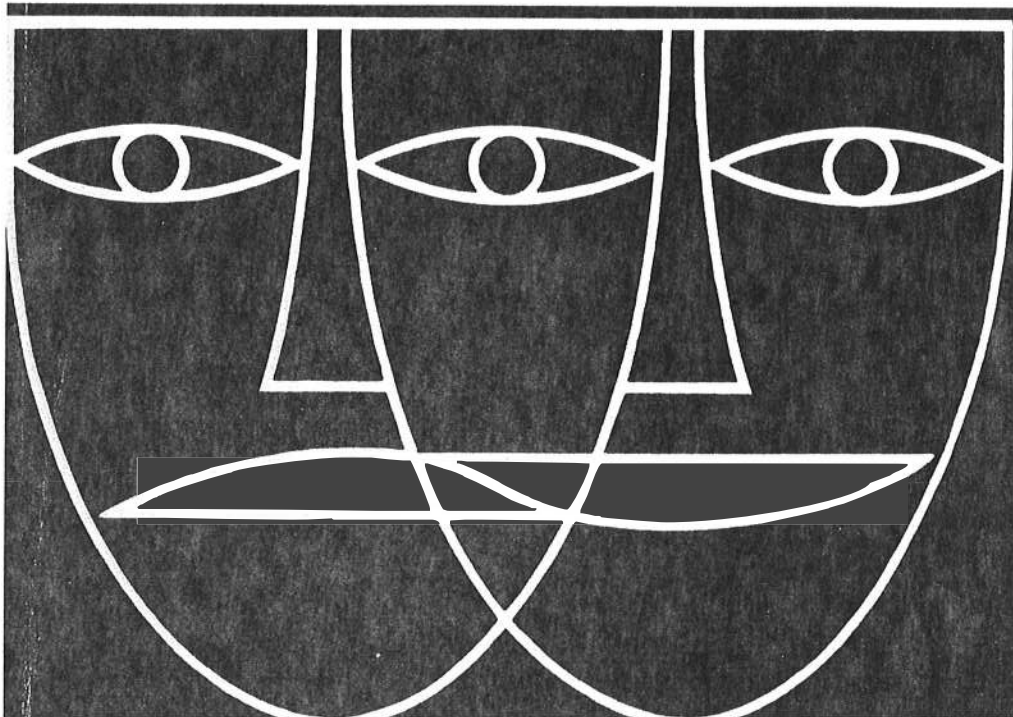


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butch than Wuornos' lover actually was, I found myself wishing I could read what Jones thought of the film.

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SARAH BAY-CHENG. *Mama Dada: Gertrude Stein's Avant-Garde Theater*. London: Routledge, 2004. Pp. 207, illustrated. \$60 (Hb).

Reviewed by Nicola Shaughnessy, University of Kent

The cover copy for *Mama Dada* claims that it is “the first major study of Stein’s dramatic works within the history of the theatrical and cinematic avant-gardes,” thereby signalling a significant repositioning of a body of dramatic writing previously addressed at full length in Betsy Alayne Ryan’s *Gertrude Stein’s Theater of the Absolute* (1984) and Jane Palatini Bowers’ *They Watch Me as They Watch This: Gertrude Stein’s Metadrama* (1991). Whereas Bowers had focused on Stein’s drama as linguistic games (“langscapes” is her term), and contested the relevance of actual performance in her work, *Mama Dada* puts theatre at the centre of Stein’s dramatic work. Bay-Cheng devotes her final chapter to the plays in performance, linking them with modernist and postmodernist avant-gardes, and assesses her affinities with Dada, futurism, and surrealism, and her influence upon The Living Theatre, Richard Foreman, and Robert Wilson. If this is reasonably familiar territory for Stein performance scholarship, the inclusion of Stein’s screenplays is not, and Bay-Cheng deploys these previously overlooked texts to formulate a model of a Steinian queer avant-garde informed by cinematic principles of fragmentation, repetition, and montage, so that “just as Stein repeats words and phrases to create a single, dynamic moment on the page, cinema uses repeated and simultaneous images to create the same effect on screen” (31).

Picasso’s portraiture of Stein, glossed as an apt homage for a writer who “embraced the past” (1) and continually sought the new, provides an initial point of departure for a study that emphasises the role of the visual image, whether drawn from fine art, film, theatre, or photography, in the evolution of Stein’s writing practice. As such, this book argues for the importance of a visual (as well as aural) dimension to Stein’s theatre aesthetic that defines it as “both a precursor of American experimental performance and a landmark in

American dramatic history" (4). Stein is thus retrospectively affiliated with a contemporary image-based avant-garde characterised by its use of mixed media, new technology and collage, and its interest in the aesthetics of dispersal and fragmentation: the cover image, incorporating a production shot of The Wooster Group's production *House/Lights* (which used Stein's *Dr Faustus Lights the Lights*) in conjunction with Joseph Mawra's film *Olga's House of Shame* (1964), is selected as embodying "the essence of Stein's drama as fragmented, technologically driven, and queer [...]. [T]he production accentuates its fusion of film and theater, including violent collisions between the two" (138). Stein's revival and survival in contemporary theatre is attributable to this synergy. Bay-Cheng's triangulation of the cinematic, the avant-garde, and the queer cites the "non-reproductive" quality of the avant-garde image (a formulation that, although she does not feature in this study, calls to mind Peggy Phelan's ontology of performance as representation without reproduction), as well as the essentially visual nature of queer identity politics:

[I]f the cinema and the avant-garde relate primarily through their manipulation of the visual, and their conventions of editing, then queerness completes the triangle as the human embodiment of the visual collage by combining both masculine and feminine, male and female, into one body. Queerness, like cinema and the avant-garde, is primarily visual. All three can be seen as codes that must be cracked in order to understand the text/image/body. (17)

The importance of code-cracking runs through the book in other ways: for any Stein scholar, as Bay-Cheng acknowledges, one of the key challenges is to make her work accessible, to demystify texts that may appear opaque, arbitrary, or just plain crazy to the uninitiated reader. She achieves this by reading and responding to Stein's drama through the lens of avant-garde film, photography, and art, emphasising the importance of perception in Stein's work or "ways of seeing." Stein, characteristically, stated that she never went to the cinema and also claimed that she had no interest in theatre either. Her work suggests the opposite; Bay-Cheng documents Stein's knowledge of and references to film forms in these works as well as in *Lectures in America*. She also recognizes the importance of "speaking" Stein's texts. Starting with two early pieces usually identified as plays (*A Movie* and *Two Sisters Who Are Not Sisters*), Bay-Cheng moves chronologically through the Stein canon, grouping works according to their links with the theatrical avant-garde (*Four Saints in Three Acts*, *They Must Be Wedded to Their Wife*, and *Listen to Me*), mapping the darkening landscape of a drama in which "the futility of creating a play in which the structure of the text, like the stability of the world, is undermined by the people within it, is perhaps best summarised in Scene V [of *Listen to Me*]" where Stein writes: "There is no Scene V" (qtd. on 69). In chapter four, Bay-Cheng presents an animated account of *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights*

(1938), arguing in favour of the play's theatricality and for the concerns it shares with the Dadaists and surrealists: loss of faith, nihilism, and a preoccupation with the technologies of war. Chapter five discusses Stein's final dramatic works: *Yes, Is for a Very Young Man* (1944–45) and *The Mother of Us All* (1945–46). These are Stein's most conventional works. Bay-Cheng's theory is that the two plays split Stein's career in two directions: "[O]ne play expands upon Stein's previous experiments in language and dramatic structure, while the other reaches into the previously unexplored world (for Stein) of representational drama" (93). The final chapter traces the afterlife of Stein's drama, exploring its production history after her death (the volume features a useful chronological list of professional productions of Stein).

Mama Dada does not claim to be comprehensive, and given Stein's vast dramatic corpus of over one hundred operas and plays, individual readers will register omissions and oversights. There is very little discussion of Stein's early plays, and Bay-Cheng argues that Stein's "best dramatic writing emerges only after her second more adventurous film experiment in 1929" (35). *Mama Dada* is a homage to Stein that carefully avoids the more controversial and troubling aspects of her personality and politics, and it ends by declaring that "ever in the vanguard," Stein "is truly 'the mother of us all'" (140). Not all readers would want to share that parentage.



LYNN C. MILLER, JACQUELINE TAYLOR, and HEATHER CARVER, eds. *Voices Made Flesh: Performing Women's Autobiography*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003. Pp. vii + 322, illustrated. \$55.00 (Hb); \$26.95 (Pb).

Reviewed by Lesley Ferris, The Ohio State University

The ambiguous title of this intriguing collection of essays heralds equally ambiguous content. My first thought on reading the title was that the collection focused on women who perform some aspect of their own life narrative. And while there are examples of this in the second half of the book (subtitled "Staging the Self"), a primary interest – and indeed the practice of two of the editors themselves – is the performance of other women's lives. This first section, entitled "Women's Historical Auto/Biography," offers a series of essays, several of which include actual scripts, about the performance of women from history. Sometimes performance material is taken from memoirs, diaries, letters, and autobiographical sources, while other times it is taken from what others have said about the woman and melded with the performer's own life material.

As a result, there is a good deal of doubling and mirroring that takes place in this collection. The book begins with two introductory essays. In the first, Miller and Taylor provide an overview of the collection and in so doing coin