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Staging Gertrude Stein: Absence, Culture, and the Landscape of American Alternative Theatre

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theatre. The first chapter presents a broad biographical overview of Terayama's life, which includes historical and cultural influences upon the playwright. The next three chapters examine different periods in the playwright / director's development, as well as provide theoretical tools for a greater understanding of his work.

In the second chapter, Sorgenfrei discusses Terayama's theatrical explorations of psychology and family. Here, the author provides an interesting and useful tool for psychoanalytic theorists. In discussing Terayama's maternal relationship, she suggests Kosawa Heisaku's "Ajase complex" as a "culturally appropriate substitute in Japan for the father-centered Oedipus complex" (60). The Indian story of Prince Ajase tells of a child whose mother kills in order to conceive him, and upon birth, attempts to kill the child out of guilt, until she finally accepts her role as a mother. The son, upon reaching adulthood, learns of his history, attempts to kill his mother, and is deserted by all but her, eventually leading to reconciliation and forgiveness. Not only is the Ajase story mirrored in the personal history of Terayama and his mother, but this idea provides scholars with new ways of approaching traditional psychoanalytic theory. As Sorgenfrei deftly shows, the ideas contained within the Ajase complex can be used to analyze familial, gendered, and sexual relationships in literature.

In the third chapter, Sorgenfrei explores Terayama's interest in the removal of traditional theatrical boundaries, including his (sometimes) controversial uses of mobile audiences and nontraditional theatre spaces. In this chapter, she also looks at how this nontraditional staging reflected the thematic content of Terayama's work, with its emphasis on shifting identities, trickster figures, and cultural (and familial) dependency. The fourth chapter looks at the cult of Terayama and explores the nostalgic and postmodern effects of his life and work. One of the more interesting aspects of this chapter is Sorgenfrei's comparison of the cultural roles played by Terayama and Mishima Yukio. Although Mishima was the political antithesis of Terayama, the author illustrates how both of them (as well as the singer Misora Hibari) created a cult-like community of fans linked by nostalgia.

The second half of the book is also a treat for theatre scholars. In it, Sorgenfrei has translated two of Terayama's playtexts as well as several of his theoretical writings on theatre. The plays include *The Hunchback of Aomori*, the first play written for Tenjō Sajiki, which serves as an excellent introduction to Terayama's themes and style. The book also includes a revised translation of *La Marie Vision* (translated by Don Kenny for production at La MaMa ETC

in New York City) as well as *Heretics*, one of the playwright's most controversial works. This translation is truly delightful because Sorgenfrei has included Terayama's staging notes, and one sees the emergence of many of the nontraditional theatrical ideas that would dominate his later works. Finally, the author has included key sections of Terayama's writings on theatre from his book, *The Labyrinth and the Dead Sea*. These sections, which deal with Terayama's avant-garde ideas for the stage, are fascinating reading not only for the Japanese theatre scholar, but also for anyone interested in nontraditional staging, experimental theatre, or the avant-garde. Finally, it should be noted that in a book which discusses these plays and theatrical ideas at length, it is most convenient to have the playtexts available to ground and inform the reader.

Unspeakable Acts adds immeasurably to the growing amount of scholarship on the modern Japanese theatre. However, this book is also a fascinating case study of one artist and invaluable to theatre scholars interested in avant-garde theatre and performance. Sorgenfrei's wonderful analysis of Terayama sheds light on an enigmatic and influential theatrical figure and bestows a wealth of information, understanding, and enjoyment to the reader.

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STAGING GERTRUDE STEIN: ABSENCE, CULTURE, AND THE LANDSCAPE OF AMERICAN ALTERNATIVE THEATRE. By Leslie Atkins Durham. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005; pp. viii + 182. \$65.00 cloth.

The last twenty years have been good to Gertrude Stein, particularly her theatrical reputation. Although she endured years of ridicule and saw only two of her plays produced during her lifetime, Stein reemerged in the late twentieth century as a major theatrical figure underpinning a wide range of experimental theatres. In his *American Avant-Garde Theatre: A History* (2000), Arnold Aronson cited Stein as one of the fundamental influences on the US avant-garde theatre, and *American Theatre* magazine covered the recurrence of Stein as a character on US stages. Throughout the 1990s Stein experienced a kind of theatrical comeback, as adaptations of her novels, plays, and biography proliferated in professional and academic theatres. Building from this theatrical attention, Leslie Atkins Durham's *Staging Gertrude Stein* is a timely consideration of the theatrical legacy of Gertrude Stein in the US

alternative theatre. Engaging both Stein's presence as a public persona and the absence of traditional theatrical elements in her plays, Durham traces the evolution of Stein's work, from her earliest collaboration with composer Virgil Thomson to recent adaptations of her novels and plays by Frank Galati and The Wooster Group.

Durham opens her book with a portrait of Stein herself as a cultural performance, particularly focusing on her 1934 tour of the United States. This tour, which brought Stein back to the US for the first time in over thirty years, marked both the literary success of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and the theatrical success of *Four Saints in Three Acts*. For Durham, this tour established Stein both as an American (although she spent nearly her entire adult life in France) and as a cultural persona. In this opening chapter, the author attempts to "spatialize Gertrude Stein's life story" (9) as the model for later productions of her plays, and she returns to Stein's biography throughout her analysis as a touchstone for the theatre to follow. It is an intriguing premise, particularly given Durham's speculation that the refashioning of Stein's public persona reveals significant themes in US theatre history. Most importantly, the space that Durham sees around Stein herself and in her plays is ultimately an open one—an absence—that theatre artists after her death would attempt to fill with their own theatrical experiments.

In her analysis of these performances, Durham eschews linear chronology in favor of thematic groupings of productions. Her emphasis here is predominantly performance analysis, a "mapping" as she calls it, of representative productions. Despite the openness of Stein's texts, Durham detects "four dominant identity issues" (4) that have preoccupied US theatre artists in productions of Stein: African American cultural identity, social rebellion against mass culture, feminism and national identity, and sexual identity. Within each of these thematic areas, Durham presents interpretations of Stein's plays as responsive to the cultural contexts in which they occur, though at times the connections feel strained. For example, she convincingly juxtaposes Virgil Thomson's successful 1934 production of *Four Saints in Three Acts* against his disappointing revival in 1952. By tracing the tropes of primitivism, race, and their social reception in both productions, Durham convincingly demonstrates the failure of the 1952 production as a measure of the cultural shifts since its premiere. However, the third production in this chapter, Frank Galati's adaptation of Stein's "Melanctha" as *Each One As She May* fits awkwardly among the two Thomson productions.

Other chapters fit together more smoothly, in part because the productions within them follow either the same source text or texts from roughly the same period in Stein's work, as in Durham's comparison between The Living Theatre's production of *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* and the Judson Poets' Theatre's "In Circles." Although referring to radically different texts, Durham unites these respective productions in their use of Stein and her abstraction to oppose the rise of mass culture. Similarly, she compares the 1976 Santa Fe Opera and 1998 Glimmerglass Opera productions of *The Mother of Us All* (1945) and their respective treatments of feminist identity and national history, noting in particular the tension between Stein's textual subversion of US society and Thomson's patriotic score. Whereas the 1976 production privileged Thomson's patriotic marches over Stein's words, the Glimmerglass production attempted "to reveal and extend the subversive qualities in Stein's libretto, thereby exacerbating the dissonance created by the meeting of Stein's work and Thomson's" (107).

Absent from these reconsiderations of production, however, is an analysis of Stein's own idiosyncratic theatrical language. It is obviously Durham's intention to focus on the productions, all of which occurred independently of Stein (even her first collaboration with Thomson was largely without her influence), but in my opinion Durham overstates the enduring openness of Stein's plays. Not all of Stein's plays are pure linguistic abstractions, and her use of narrative, character, and plot changed profoundly over the course of her career. Durham's reading of homosexuality in various productions of *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* is well served by her contextualization of Stein's "cloaked lesbianism" during her lecture tour and the cultural context of the 1990s, but there is evidence of Stein's queerness in the play itself. Indeed, most of Stein's later plays—most notably *Doctor Faustus* and *The Mother of Us All*—contain critiques of heterosexual marriage, and Stein's final opera integrates considerations of race and class into her analysis of gender as a social and political performance.

Nevertheless, there is much of interest throughout the book. Readers interested in the major US productions of Stein's work will find a useful overview of them, and Durham has successfully reconstructed many of the earlier performances. However, without previous knowledge of the plays themselves, one could be forgiven for thinking that Stein's theatrical legacy is one of open-ended potential, rather than a body of compelling, complex, and often theatrical work.

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