
Reception Studies as an independent discipline has made rapid, if sometimes erratic progress, in the last forty years, especially as it relates to classical literature. Stage performance still remains problematic for the theatre historian with the central concern never satisfactorily addressed. Theatre is the throwaway art, as difficult to record as ice sculpture or a sandcastle built below the tideline. There may be modelbuchs, photographs or a video, personal claims or recollections from creators and critics, but none of these offers reliable witness. The best to be hoped for is a composite view or a majority verdict. It sometimes seems as though finding a way of addressing past performance in any meaningful way is impossible. In her new book, Erika Fischer-Lichte shows that such analysis is not only possible, but stimulating and challenging, giving the theatre a historical and contemporary significance it has not always been seen to enjoy. The range and depth of her previously published work made the author an ideal President of the International Federation for Theatre Research from 1995-9, and current Director of the International Research Centre “Interweaving Performing Cultures.” In *Dionysus Resurrected,* she reinforces her rare combination of intellectual authority and wide understanding of the processes of theatrical performance.

In 2004, Edith Hall, Fiona Macintosh, and Amanda Wrigley edited a book of essays on the revival of Greek Tragedy under the title of *Dionysus Since 69* (recalling the title of Richard Schechner’s New York production *Dionysus in 69*). One contribution, from Fischer-Lichte, entitled “Thinking about the Origins of the Theatre in the 1970s,” focused on the Berlin Schaubühne’s 1974 Antiquity Project and Michael Gröber’s *Bakchen.* As she returns to this production in Chapter 4 of *Dionysus Resurrected,* one might be tempted to wonder why this new study should be necessary only ten years later. She spells out the reason in her subtitle “Performances of the Bacchae in a Globalizing World,” and in her response to the Hall, Macintosh, and Wrigley book: “By restricting their examples to performances in Western countries (with one notable exception: Lorna Hardwick’s contribution on “Greek Drama and Anti-Colonialism”) ... the performances are related to more recent social, political, aesthetic, and scientific developments in that part of the world, serving as a kind of missing link in terms of an explanation” (xii).

chapter, “Celebrating a Communion Rite?” looks at Wole Soyinka’s *The Bacchae of Euripides* as it was adapted within a Yoruba setting at the National Theatre in London in 1973. The third, “Sparagmos and Omophagia,” addresses a 1996 production of *Bacantes* in Sao Paulo from Teat(r)o Oficina: “The key words here are ritual, festival and carnival” (72).

Part II: “Renegotiating Cultural Identities,” starts by revisiting the Schaubühne Antiquity Project from a different perspective in a chapter entitled “On the Strangeness and Inaccessibility of the Past.” She, then, turns to Theodoros Terzopoulos’ *The Bacchae* (initially Delphi, 1986) in “Performing or Contaminating Greekness?” This was a production which provoked rabid hostility as having betrayed Greek culture in favour of Japanese (a continuing debate to which chairing heated post-production discussions on the Greek cultural legacy at The European Cultural Centre at Delphi have abundantly testified). The final chapter in this section, “In Search of New Identities,” on Krzysztof Warlinski’s *The Bacchae* in Warsaw (2001), focuses on a production in Catholic Poland which, similarly, polarized critics in its apparent defining of “the relationship of theatre and society in such a way that theatre was accorded the license, indeed the duty, to address questions of faith and religion ...” (151).

The third and final Part: “Productive Encounter or Destructive Clash of Cultures,” picks up on cross-cultural issues raised in the Terzopoulos chapter and takes a deeper look at questions of influence, appropriation, and absorption. “Dismemberment and the Quest for Wholeness” relates to Suzuki Tadashi’s *The Bacchae*, one of those international productions which have toured the world (thus dated 1978-2008). “Transforming Kathakali” (1998) tells the strange story of a production by Guru Sadanam P.V. Balakrishnan (Delphi and New Delhi), effectively commissioned as a Kathakali *Bacchae* by the Committee of the Greek Drama International Meetings at Delphi without it being clear what the relationship should be between the two theatrical traditions. The resultant juggling over which tradition should be celebrated comes down to the difference between Kathakali being “transformed” and being “dismembered.” The final chapter picks up on this dichotomy under the title “Beijing Opera Dismembered” (1996). This is the most alarming and unexpected chapter revolving round a destructive collaboration—perhaps “collision” would be a better description—between America-based director Chen Shi-zheng, appointed to work with the China National Beijing Opera Ensemble, and Peter Steadman, director of the New York Greek Drama Company, who has fixed ideas on how the play should be performed and, bizarrely, declared an interest in *The Bacchae* as being the only Greek tragedy with a comic dimension. Can the director of a company dedicated to recreating “authentic” performances of Greek drama (whatever that may mean) really never have read Euripides’ *Electra, Ion, Orestes or Helen*? Steadman seems to have ensured that it was Chen Shi-zheng who took the blame for the production’s failure.

This is the baldest outline which does no justice to the richness of Fischer-
Lichte’s commentary: a fascinating series of encounters and critiques. She makes no bones about having seen hardly any of the productions and having to rely on videos, interviews with directors, and second-hand encounters often filtered through translation (adaptation?). Somehow, she renders the perennial problems of reception as virtues by a comprehensive locating of the productions within broad cultural and socio-historical contexts. And where that is difficult, as with the Chinese production, for example (Chapter 9), she succeeds in finding other terms of reference which are equally cogent and significant.

Apart from a tiny slip, which credits Arthur Miller rather than Edward Albee with authorship of *The American Dream*, there is only one major point raised which might be challenged. In her Preface, Fischer-Lichte suggests that “Greek tragedies are usually translated to be performed” (xiii). Even if that were true today (a moot point in the light of the multiple English-language editions of Greek tragedies available in print from Aris and Phillips, CUP, Chicago, Harvard, Methuen Drama, Nick Hern, OUP, Penguin, the Univ of Penn et al), of the fifteen or so translations of *The Bacchae* published in English before Gilbert Murray’s in 1902, not one was aimed at other than the reading public.

But this is a quibble and nothing can challenge the most impressive features of this informative and accessible book. Nobody else could have written it, but the issues it raises surely open doors to further exploration and, hopefully, will prove a stimulus to the next generation of scholars and practitioners.

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