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A History of Italian Theatre. Ed. Joseph Farrell and Paolo
Puppa

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Theatre Survey, Volume 49, Number 2, November 2008, pp. 307-309 (Review)



Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/tsu.2008.a986244>

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sketch of modernism—Ibsen, Joyce, Pirandello, and Beckett make quick appearances—in which the category of expectation remains crucial. That is, even if these works put expectation to use in novel ways, the rhetorician remains confident that this central category remains the crucial one in the interpretation of theatre and literature.

When returning to Burke, scholarly readers may encounter two claims that may cause a salutary uneasiness. First, Burke’s confidence that rhetoric describes structures that transcend their historical moment will perturb many historicists. In particular, this will provocatively challenge many contemporary Shakespeareans. Second, Burke’s argument that modernist works are aiming at the same core of appetite, desire, and expectation that formed the target of earlier modes will discomfit avant-gardists. Shakespeareans, historicists, and avant-gardists alike may decide that Burke is wrong. If, however, this volume provokes new debates about the legibility and historicity of drama’s address to its audience—to us?—Burke will have, once again, satisfied the most demanding expectations.



A History of Italian Theatre. Ed. Joseph Farrell and Paolo Puppa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006; pp. xiv + 418, 29 illus. \$125 cloth.

doi:10.1017/S0040557408001221

Reviewed by Patricia Gaborik, independent scholar

A History of Italian Theatre makes a much needed attempt to fill a gap in Anglo-American produced national theatre histories. As coeditor Joseph Farrell points out in his introduction, “In Search of Italian Theatre,” Italy’s theatrical history is largely unfamiliar to an English-language audience. The Italian theatre must be thought about differently, he argues, because of the tradition’s anomalous centrality of the actor, as opposed to the playwright; further, its history needs to be told with an eye toward this particularity. Thirty-four chapters follow, written by twenty-three contributors and organized into six period-defined units, dedicated to the effort to “examine Italian theatre in its rich complexity, and not to focus narrowly on writing alone” (3).

Although this premise works to carve out an intriguing space for the Italian theatre, it seems a strange point of emphasis for the book, given that any theatre history should by definition go beyond the dramatic text. Even more puzzling is the book’s failure to demonstrate the uniqueness it hopes to celebrate. Only a handful of chapters are expressly dedicated to staging practices, and these chapters usually appear as summaries at the beginning of each unit. Fourteen chapters center on the dramatic output of single writers, while a smattering of others cover dramatic-literary genres or groups of authors. If one of the agendas of this book is to stress the importance of Italian theatre’s acting and actors (or, I would suggest, its equally important directors), where are its chapters on Eleonora Duse, the futurist *serate*, Carmelo Bene, or Luca Ronconi? These

figures do fleetingly appear, but given the book's mandate to think beyond dramatic literature alone, accentuating them would yield more satisfying results. Duse is mentioned most often in reference to d'Annunzio's plays, but discussing her acting of his characters would go a long way in signaling the actress' performance while giving space to the writer's works. Similarly, no one will deny the importance of Pirandello's plays, and they are given attentive treatment in a nineteen-page chapter by Paola Puppa. Pirandello's *Teatro d'Arte* was revolutionary and his directing for the company magisterial, yet they receive only brief mention. Focusing on this work rather than on his drama would have provided an opportunity to paint a much more detailed picture: to discuss the *Teatro*'s relationship with the Fascist government; the astounding scenic design developed by its artists; the experimental, international repertory it produced (including Pirandello's plays); and the rise of Pirandello as director and Marta Abba as actress. Such a choice would have taken the discussion into the realm of theatrical, not just dramatic, history. Largely because the book is organized around a list of usual suspects (Machiavelli, Goldoni, Pirandello) rather than around the guiding premise of Italian theatre's uniqueness, in the end it gives the impression that Italy's theatre history revolves around its dramatic literature as much as any other nation's might.

To counteract the usual-suspects effect, it should be noted, the editors make a commendable effort to include lesser-known moments and artists in Italian theatre history, such as the Romantic and dialect theatre, and some of Pirandello's less famous contemporaries such as Massimo Bontempelli and Pier Maria Rosso di San Secondo. Unfortunately, the very limited space available for each chapter (which range in length from three to twenty pages) makes it difficult to probe the questions that would transform such a book from historical survey into substantive history. Few authors are given the space to engage with their topic in depth, and thus provocative questions are raised but unexplored. For instance, in a series of chapters on Renaissance staging and comedy by Richard Andrews and Kenneth and Laura Richards, the first appearance of women on the stage (which Andrews dates to probably the 1540s and the Richards to the 1560s) is alternately referred to as a "shocking revolution" inexplicable within the context of the epoch's humanism (31–2) and "probably a calculated bid for greater commercial appeal" (106). If a large portion of the Renaissance unit had been dedicated to a chapter on the staging of comedy rather than to numerous brief chapters on genres and writers, perhaps the question could have been plumbed in a satisfying manner—across the boundaries of amateur and professional performance and across the geopolitical borders of Renaissance Italy's city-states—and released from an unintentional subordination to authors and genres. Of the ten chapters on the Renaissance, five focus on authors or academies, three on literary-dramatic genres, one on *commedia dell'arte*, and one on the Renaissance stage.

As this last example suggests, though, the volume's many talented contributors provide plenty of useful references, curious details, and intriguing threads to unravel. Peter Brand comments suggestively on the overlap of religious and secular performance under Este rule in Ferrara. Antonio Scuderi's piece on Sicilian dialect theatre and Piermario Vescovo's on Goldoni provide

models for balancing discussion of text and theatrical production. Ferdinando Taviani's article on the Romantic theatre nicely underlines another Italian peculiarity: the definitive communication between literature, opera, and dialect theatre in creating the modern Italian prose theatre. All this is to say that *A History of Italian Theatre* has definite strengths among unfortunate weaknesses. Its shortcomings are in the end an additional testament to the challenges Farrell and Puppa identified in setting out to produce the volume. Their ambitious project, even in its missteps, demonstrates a continued need to unveil the richness of Italy's stage tradition, to approach tired stories from fresh perspectives, to follow new paths in our search for the Italian theatre.



A History of Asian American Theatre. By Esther Kim Lee. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006; pp. xvii + 264, 15 illus. \$99 cloth. doi:10.1017/S0040557408001233

Reviewed by Daphne Lei, University of California, Irvine

Esther Kim Lee is a superb storyteller. Her long overdue book *A History of Asian American Theatre* is a survey of Asian American theatre for about four decades, from the 1960s to the 2000s. It was not an easy history to make, but it is a wonderful story to read.

Accounting for approximately 4 percent of the entire U.S. population, Asian Americans have had a difficult time finding a space in society, and especially finding an artistic arena for self-expression. Ever since the founding of the East West Players in 1965, Asian American theatres have been growing and nurturing theatre talents. Nonetheless, most scholarship on Asian American theatre has a limited scope; the works usually focus on individual playwrights, plays, or productions. Several play anthologies have been published since the 1990s. Josephine Lee, Karen Shimakawa, Dorinne Kondo, James Moy, and Robert G. Lee, among others, have outlined the historical background and laid the theoretical foundations for understanding the staging of Asian Americans in theatre, film, and popular culture. Miles Xian Liu's *Asian American Playwrights* (Greenwood Press, 2002) collects more than fifty biographies of Asian American playwrights. However, a work devoted specifically to the history of the entire Asian American theatre spectrum is indeed rare. Yuko Kurahashi's *Asian American Culture on Stage: The History of the East West Players* (Garland, 1999) is probably the nearest thing to such a history, but its focus is on one theatre only. *A History of Asian American Theatre* is thus a book that is much needed to provide a comprehensive overview and a "story" of Asian American theatre.

The majority of *A History* generally follows the chronological development of the genre: Chapter 1, "Asian American Theatre before 1965," gives an overview of the earliest Asian American theatres. Chapter 2, "Actors in the 1960s and 1970s," focuses on the actors whose efforts and struggles helped pave the