

BOOK REVIEWS

James Robert Allard and Mathew R. Martin (eds). *Staging Pain 1580–1800: Violence and Trauma in British Theater*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009. Pp. 183.

Staging Pain 1580–1800: Violence and Trauma in British Theater is a collection of ten essays that engage with the question of the theatrical representation of pain and trauma in the long early modern period. The scope of the project is useful, taking the reader through various treatments of the key issues from the opening of the professional theatres in London, through the Restoration and into the Enlightenment, each period bringing to bear on this exploration of drama's relationship to pain new questions, new definitions of the 'natural' and of verisimilitude, and new attitudes toward the productive or destructive functions of spectacles of pain. Breaking with the chronological structure, however, the book is divided into four thematic sections: Part I: 'Traumatic Effects', which features psychoanalytical models of trauma; Part II: 'Pedagogies of Pain', which explores the role played by spectacles of pain in the refinement and enculturation of the subject; Part III: 'Bodies (Im)Politic', which focuses on the instantiation and subversion of state power by the scripts and rituals of spectacular punishment; and Part IV: 'Spectacular Failures', which looks at the excesses of eighteenth-century stage spectacle and their implication in 'larger cultural failures' (10).

In their introduction, Allard and Martin provide a succinct and useful historical overview of philosophical and critical attitudes toward the complex relationship of art to pain. They begin with the familiar debate regarding the 'contagious' nature of represented pain and its assumed tendency either to degrade the human mind by feeding the passions (Plato) or to regulate and elevate citizens through the mechanisms of catharsis (Aristotle) and the vicarious, 'moving' experience of noble suffering and just punishment (Sidney). This notion of 'contagion' or the 'communicable' nature of theatricalized

pain is posed against Elaine Scarry's formulation of pain as unrepresentable, which, Allard and Martin argue, is the very motivation for art and for this collection: 'the unrepresentability of pain prompts its appropriation, and the pressing question, for Scarry and for many of the essays in this volume, becomes "Who speaks for pain?"' (6). Allard and Martin then move on to a brief survey of Marx, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Burke, Kant, and Freud to demonstrate that, as a nexus of the mind, body, and the external world, pain 'is not external to modern aesthetics as one possible object to be imitated but internal to it as its very precondition' (5). 'Plague or purgation,' they suggest, 'the aesthetic appropriation of pain is at the center of classical and early modern theorizing about the nature and import of art in general and theater in particular' (2). With the introduction into this debate of Cathy Caruth's model of 'trauma' as the narrative (or compulsive anti-narrative), belated repetition of an ineffable experience of violence, Allard and Martin make their most interesting intervention in the area of early modern aesthetics of pain. As some of the essays show, this notion of trauma opens up alternative ways of reading genre, particularly tragedy, and conventional representations of the psychic aftermath of violence.

It is with trauma that the collection begins in Part I: 'Traumatic Effects'. Mathew R. Martin's essay, "'This tragic glass": Tragedy and Trauma in *Tamburlaine Part I*', identifies the play as a trauma narrative. Making sophisticated use of Freudian and Lacanian models of the split-subject, Martin argues that trauma in *Tamburlaine Part I* unsettles tragic mimesis, demonstrating an 'ontological insufficiency' (21) that refuses tragic catharsis. The play, therefore, challenges the generic presupposition of a unified, rational, and self-sufficient universe where autonomous subjects experience the resolution of *anagnorisis* that recuperates the disruptions of violence and trauma. In the traumatic repetitions that drive his violent appropriation of symbols of power, Tamburlaine achieves no catharsis. The play, therefore, 'represents not a stepping-stone in the development of English Renaissance tragedy but an obstacle, the outside or other of tragedy' (29). This essay fruitfully deploys the concept of trauma to reconfigure the common understanding of the play's place within the history of the tragic genre.

Turning to the Freudian model of cathexis and the roles played by 'bound' and 'unbound' energies in ego-formation and its traumatic disorganization, Zackariah C. Long's "'Uncollected Man": Trauma and the Early Modern Mind-Body in *The Maid's Tragedy*' aims to analyze 'correspondences between modern and early modern trauma within a specific and historically

responsible framework' (31). However, in its mechanical application of the Freudian model to Amintor's so-called post-traumatic stress disorder the essay fails adequately to address the twin problematics of, first, applying Freudian psychoanalysis to what is not a psyche but an artistic construct and, second, accounting for the very different conceptions of both character and identity that define the early modern period. Some brief attention is paid to this latter issue in Long's references to the early modern notion of 'uncollectedness', but on the whole the essay assimilates the play to a modern psychoanalytical model by reducing its artistic treatment of trauma to 'metaphors' of an ahistorical psyche and 'eerie' 'anticipations' of Freud (39). The promise of a rigorously historicized treatment of trauma goes unfulfilled in favour of a programmatic tabulation of 'correspondences'.

In Part II: 'Pedagogies of Pain', two essays explore 'the pedagogical use of pain [that] extends beyond the disciplining of the individual body to the instruction of the entire community' (47). In "'These were spectacles to please my soul": Inventive Violence in the Renaissance Revenge Tragedy', Annalisa Castaldo rehearses the critically commonplace equivalence between scaffold and stage to 'look at the validity of the claim that revenge tragedies are inherently conservative' (51) in their support of state power (whose claim this may be is unclear, as no sources are cited, a problem with the essay as a whole). Castaldo's essay, which refers to a range of plays including *The Spanish Tragedy*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, and *The Revenger's Tragedy*, argues that tragedy both legitimizes private revenge by iconographically linking it to state-sponsored violence *and* questions state-sponsored violence by making the spectacle of revenge, rather than justice, the focus (56). This idea of the simultaneously legitimizing and destabilizing interaction of theatrical and state violence has much potential, but the essay tends to rest on a number of confusing contradictions, such as Castaldo's assertion that, on the one hand, 'English playwrights forced the audience to approve the violence [of revengers] in the same way they would by attending a state-sponsored execution' (52) while, on the other, they presented their work to the 'unruly spectator' who may impose 'his own reading' onto spectacles of pain (53). What makes one context so forceful as to demand a particular identification and the other so prone to polysemy? This essay offers several interesting moments, primarily those dealing with drama's politically disruptive arousal of sympathy for revengers, but these are qualified by such contradictions, whether real or apparent, and a general lack of precision and clarity of argument.

The second essay in this section is among the best in the volume. In ‘A “Bracing” Moment: Reynolds’ Response to Boswell and Burke on the Aesthetics and Ethics of Public Executions’, William Levine explores Sir Joshua Reynolds’s 1785 response to criticism he received for attending a public hanging. In this lucidly argued essay, Levine explores how Reynolds’s rebuttal engages with a key question of eighteenth-century aesthetics: ‘how to convey both the acculturated refinement of style and the tragically sacrificial force of human suffering in an advanced, culturally sophisticated civilization’ (58). Situating the stoic performance of the criminal in the elevated context of ‘momentous history’ (68) and neo-classical decorum, Reynolds’s response pits the ‘taste’ of the acculturated spectator against a low-class and feminized ‘domestic’ definition of tragedy that foregrounds the material details of suffering. Reynolds’s aestheticization of the scaffold spectacle elides the class markers of the scene in favour of a universally edifying and ‘aesthetically gratifying’ (67) spectacle. This shift simultaneously reinforces gender- and class-based distinctions between refined and excessively ‘domestic’ sympathies.

Part III: ‘Bodies (Im)Politic’ begins with ‘Radical Pity: Responding to Spectacles of Violence in *King Lear*’ where John D. Staines argues that tragic theatre educates the spectator to respond to cruelty with appropriate acts of justice (78), a response that entails a concomitant potential to ‘destabilize the political order’ (79). After a lengthy discussion of revenge tragedy that concludes with the assertion that ‘*Lear*, of course, is not a revenge tragedy’ (85), Staines turns to a close reading of the blinding of Gloucester to demonstrate that ‘*Lear* ... offers a parody of attempts to give meaning to violence that is, at its root, nothing more than the arbitrary and unrestrained exercise of power’ (85). His argument would be clarified by a more specific definition of ‘justice’ and a closer consideration of the role played by the distinction between civil and natural justice in the spectators’ ‘rejection of the violent institutions of governance’ (91).

In her essay, ‘Cutting, Branding, Whipping, Burning: The Performance of Judicial Wounding in Early Modern England’, Sarah Covington provides a historical overview of the practices and symbolism of state-sponsored spectacles of pain, adding to existing scholarship by focusing on lesser punishments that involved greater community participation ‘rather than the vertical, univocal projection of state power’ (96–7). Her lengthy catalogue of various forms of mimetic punishment (that is, those that symbolically recapitulate the crime, such as the amputation of a hand for libel) demonstrates a reciprocal

relationship of borrowing and influence among medieval theatre, state spectacle, and early modern theatre that exposes a mutually reinforcing dependence 'between the stage and the scaffold, the mimetic and the real' (110). Covington's essay contributes usefully to the stage-scaffold equivalence discussion by identifying historical grounds for the claim to shared symbolic systems.

Susan B. Iwanisziw's discussion of Elkanah Settle's *The Empress of Morocco* (1671) and *The Heir of Morocco, with the Death of Gayland* (1682) in her essay, 'Tortured Bodies, Factionalism and Unsettled Loyalties in Settle's Moroccan Plays' provides lengthy summaries of the two plays in order to trace their allegorical representation of Restoration Stuart attempts to establish 'authoritative insignia' of power through state-sponsored terror (113). Because of Settle's own political vacillation (from Royalist to Whig and back again), the specific nature of his 'engagement with the spectacle of torturous execution' (136) and the meaning of the spectacles he stages remain fraught and ambiguous; he is able to support Charles II against 'parliamentary chicanery' but must acknowledge 'the restored Stuarts as torturous executioners in their own right' (124). Given the emphasis in the essay on Settle's literary output as a *response* to the various forces that determined his personal fortunes within the Court, it remains unclear whether or not Settle's example supports Iwanisziw's case that 'the staging of psychic and political terrors shaping the tensions of dramatic tragedy is the *precondition* for the life-threatening actions that characterize socio-political terrorism' (111, emphasis mine). Settle's place in this apparently causal structure could be better elucidated. That said, the essay does a good job of exploring the complexities of Settle's responses to the volatile conditions of his day.

Part iv: 'Spectacular Failures' asks, 'To what extent ... is violence, and perhaps the attendant pain and trauma so often associated with it *productive* rather than simply destructive?' (137). It suggests the possibility 'that a response of any kind — condemnation, encouragement, apathy — is a form of participation and, thus, perpetration and perpetuation' (138). One such 'response' is explored in Kara Reilly's essay, 'Lavinia's Rape: Reading the Restoration Actress's Body in Pain in Ravenscroft's *Titus*'. Burdened by a strained analytical model and exhibiting the need for a thoroughgoing copy-edit, this is unfortunately the weakest essay in the volume. Reilly's distinctions between the material site of the female body, the citation of rape in the theatre, and the complex responses elicited by the sight of the female actor on the Restoration stage have great critical potential which remains unfulfilled. These distinctions are superficially treated, and the terms are ultimately

reduced to tags, epitomized by the awkward references to Lavinia's or Anne Bracegirdle's 'body-site'. Reilly's discussion of Lavinia retraces well-covered ground that reads Lavinia as an allegory of the state and her silencing as a demonstration of Kristevan abjection. The focus on Ravenscroft's adaptation, however, allows Reilly to add an additional layer of Whig allegory to this well-known and often-told tale. The turn to the case of Anne Bracegirdle, who is assumed to have played Lavinia, and to the condition of the female actor in the discursive economies of the Restoration theatre and city likewise offers an opportunity for trenchant analysis: an opportunity that is lost to a discussion of the irony that Bracegirdle, known for her chastity, was also renowned for paying rape victims and was herself a victim of an attempted abduction. While there is some utility in noting the conflicts within and the complexities of Bracegirdle's material experience and its various discursive deployments, in the end it is difficult to tell what point is being made about Bracegirdle or about the site/cite/sight model. Overall, this essay indicates some significant avenues of exploration but does not enter them.

By contrast, Cecilia A. Feilla's essay 'Sympathy Pains: Filicide and the Spectacle of Male Heroic Suffering on the Eighteenth-century Stage' provides an excellent example of the ways in which particular representations can be linked to broader social and conventional forces. In her discussion of filicide (the killing of offspring by a father) in bourgeois tragedy, Feilla identifies a shift in attitudes from a dismissal of filicide as too 'painful and horrific' to be staged to an approbation of it as 'beautiful and profound' (153). This shift reflects, she argues, 'the development of the sentimental theatre and a sentimental notion of virtue based on sympathy' (153). Echoing Levine, who finds in the deployment of 'taste' a recuperation of scaffold spectacle as a site of edification and refinement, Feilla argues that sensibility rehabilitates filicide. Looking at the way filicide is represented in three plays and their adaptations — *Appius and Virginia*, *Brutus*, and *The Deserter* — Feilla demonstrates the shift from a Roman model of civic virtue to a sentimental sympathy for the struggles of a father tormented by the conflicting demands of justice and filial care. Heroic action is replaced by heroic suffering and a 'new masculinity' appears, 'based upon the rule of the heart' (165). This elegant article stands out in the volume.

The collection closes with James Robert Allard's 'Joanna Baillie and the Theater of Consequence', an essay that focuses on Baillie's *DeMontfort, A Tragedy* (1798) and its proposed revival as a vehicle for Edmund Kean in 1815. The play provides the opportunity to explore the ways that Baillie's

dramaturgy redefined the 'natural' by offering to replace a neo-classical and overtly pictorial and gestural mode of realism with one that was more sensitive to the finer, more nuanced representation of the passions and the inner life that she claimed was precluded by the eighteenth-century penchant for large stages, spectacle, and melodrama. In staging the aftermath of violence, rather than violence itself (no violence appears on stage in a drama that takes violent passion as its subject), Baillie makes her case for what Allard calls a 'theater of consequence' that 'aims as much to dramatize the personal and societal consequences of trauma (more than to stage the spectacle of the trauma itself) as it does to demand a theater of weight and import, one of consequence rather than diversion' (172). This discussion is provocatively framed by an exchange between Baillie and Sir Walter Scott on the topic of the revival in which Baillie's narrative is interrupted by references to recent battles in the Napoleonic Wars and the condition of the returning soldiers. This concern frames her own assessment of the potential, and the potential failure, of a 'theater of consequence' to engage the 'real' in the context of history's horrors. This interesting essay looks at the multiple ways in which the 'real' may be dramatized and how drama may be reframed in its turn by the 'real'.

In its engagement with the 'theatrical' representation of pain, and the social, political, and discursive work performed by such representation, *Staging Pain* takes its place in a growing body of criticism that generally locates its roots in the work of Michel Foucault and Elaine Scarry. The book traverses some well-trodden territory between Scarry's assertion of the isolating and world-destroying nature of pain and Foucault's treatment of the political and discursive power of painful spectacle. Many of the essays refer to or turn on the familiar and generally unproblematized equivalence drawn between the scaffolds of state punishment and the theatre, on the grounds of their mutual 'scripting' of bodily suffering; their structural similarities in terms of their public, spectacular nature; and their shared appropriation of conventional narratives of salvation, sacrifice, heroic forbearance, purgation, or providence. In this sense, the collection does not greatly expand the critical field or introduce bold new questions that will radically reframe the current debates. That said, its situating of pain firmly within the realm of aesthetics and its introduction of trauma as an analytical category open the way to fruitful explorations, and its close readings of the various works explored add necessary detail to the map of the territory.

LISA DICKSON