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Reviews

Posthuman Spiritualities in Contemporary Performance: *Politics, Ecologies and Perceptions* by Silvia Battista. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, 219 pp. £59.99 hardcover. ISBN: 978-3-319-89757-8. £43.99 ebook. ISBN: 978-3-319-89758-5.

Silvia Battista seeks to bridge the complex relationships between inner experience and material existence—a topic that is central not only to the study of religion and performance, but to the empirical sciences as well. In order to do this, Battista offers a new term, which she borrows from Michel Foucault: "technologies of the self." Battista returns to the roots of the word "technology" to remind readers that it has always included an aspect of return to the perceiving self: "repetitive activities and behaviours: a specific methodological organization and arrangement of activities employed to modify how individuals, and whole categories, perceive themselves" (10). Through engagement with five discrete performance events/constructs, Battista brings to our attention the shifting notions of perception as related to spiritual technologies. Spiritual technologies that modify perception on both individual and communal levels include contemplation, meditation, prayer, breath work, isolation, silence, repetition, sensory deprivation, and ecstatic dance. By putting spiritual and performative technologies in critical conversation with one another, Battista furthers the impact of each artistic presentation beyond the performance arena and asks us to consider the ideological implications of such works. She situates the numinous encounters afforded by spiritual discipline within the ecological and humanitarian concerns of our time, proposing that performance allows an engagement with the fruits of spiritual discipline that are useful to a secular collective. Works analysed include *The Artist is Present* by Marina Abramović, *Deer Shelter Skyscape* by James Turrell, *CAT* by Ansuman Biswas, *Journey to the Lower World* by Marcus Coates, and *Work with Pollen* by Wolfgang Laib.

Religions create ritual practices that perform their theologies so that, as communities experience periods of separation, religious practice will bind them together despite distance and difference. In this way, any religious practice can be approached as a "technology" because it enables individuals to experience themselves as part of the larger group. However, such technologies can just as easily lend themselves to the gathering of political power for social control. In her use of Jung's concept of *relegare* as the root of religion, rather than *religare* (198), Battista highlights the ethical considerations of religious dogma, and the use of its technologies within the cultural sector. Battista evokes the deeper root of religious practices to propose that their capacities to engender the numinous can be, and are, made apparent through careful aesthetic consideration.

A key concept that is woven throughout the text is that of unity. With emphasis on an infinite potential of cultural configurations, the migration of spiritual technologies across structures, both cultural and religious, opens new possibilities for co-created and generative spaces where the numinous acts as the unifying factor among diverse hierarchies of perceptive faculties. For example, in 'The Artist is Present' by Abramović, the technology of reciprocal gazing opens a space whereby the organs of sense, the eyes, expand beyond the faculty of seeing. In such a space the structures of sight, including rods, cones, colours and the like become sublimated to a feeling of effacement, or surrender to the numinous. The numinous becomes palpable and is in fact 'the event'.

Battista's technologies remind us that the whole body is involved in processes of perception, which includes the spirit. Sight is one such sensation that Battista considers between body and spirit. When Rumi writes, 'See with your inner eye', this cannot be explained entirely through physiological sensorial processes. In the works analysed by Battista, sight is directed toward the interior, both by the artists in their conceptualisations of their work and as a mode of new discovery in participants. Each of the five performances that Battista analyses is an invitation to gaze more fully and more deeply; members of the public are directed toward their own interior experience. For example, in 'Deer Shelter Skyscape' by Turrell, the public moves from an above-ground natural landscape through a tunnel into an underground chamber. Here, light moves through a framed opening in the ceiling. In contrast to the darkness around, light becomes the natural focus. In time, people slowly move toward the observation benches below the skylight and as the minutes and hours tick by, inner modes of contemplation may be prompted. Audience members much move from watching to participation, then beyond participation to the special mode of inner observation that spiritual practice can engender. While perception is limited by experience, Battista proposes that in opening an interior experience the artistic work can further open both cultural and material horizons in perception.

Advancing theories in posthumanism, non-humanism and agential realism, Battista shows how subversion of the dominant binaries of body/mind that have overridden our other senses in a Cartesian model can be further utilised to subvert binaries of the spiritual/material and ordinary/extraordinary. Citing scholars working between materialism and feminism such as Karen Barad, Jane Bennet and Rosi Bradotti, Battistsa elucidates a complex landscape where performance may act upon the post-human considerations of the collective to offer a viewpoint of essential divinity. We might ask, from such a viewpoint, who or what is 'the other' that emerges

in perceptual discovery? If it is God, is this God a useful one, who can guide us into a deeper engagement with ourselves, each other and our planet, beyond religious dogma? Is the light within the same as the light we have previously called God, and what are our options in accessing this light as a new humanity? In her approach to Laib and his 'Work with Pollen', Battista proposes that 'secular spiritual technologies' (181) may play a key role in facilitating ecological epiphany and non-violence. Through deep presence with nature in the act of making, artists fashion an 'onto-politics' (177), which models reciprocal, interdependent—even sacred—cycles of exchange.

Discussions of space and structure are woven throughout each analysis. The real and symbolic conditions and boundaries of each artistic work are cleverly deployed to create possibility. For example, in *Deer Shelter Skyscape*, light can be shaped to our perceptual faculties but it needs boundaries to be fully visible. Considering the ethics of performance, Battista inquires into the potential mythologising of the artist, the event, and into the vulnerability of participants in entering the numinous within such contexts. In 'CAT' by Biswas, the artist sets himself apart in a black box through which no sound, light or motion may be detected. In a move typical of eastern philosophical approaches to the spiritual, a natural sense of order, coherence and stability are ruptured. In the context of a gallery, where there is no spiritual guide, the ensuing vulnerabilities of the audience can only be ameliorated by turning away from the artist, by turning inward.

While the other works in this text seek to open perception within participants, Coates's *Journey to the Lower World* offers only the exterior artifacts of an interior experience on the part of the artist; the numinous experience of Coates is invisible to the audience. This raises the question of what kind of spiritual resources are available to whom. In the mainstreaming of older knowledge bases, we might consider if all spiritual technologies are to be used with the same lens of cultural and structural migration. For example, how is shamanism different from contemporary yoga and meditation? What were yoga and meditation before they became mainstream? What are the possibilities of each technology in the project of post-humanism? *Journey to the Lower World* was a shamanic ritual offered to a community in order to find an answer for a crisis—where is a community supposed to go when their housing block is about to be demolished? Battista proposes that the piece acts as a bridge between the numinous encounter of the artist with other embodied human presences. How do numinous perceptions move between bodies and presences? How do the conditions and constraints of each technology give us clues, rather than dogmas, for its creative and generative capacities? Further, how do we ensure within the post-human era that our technologies are utilised for the numinous rather than for control?

Battista further proposes that we make use of performance within a wider 'project of creativity' (195) to facilitate a reconnection of the human to self, other, and the natural world. Via a deep engagement with timeless practices, artists may facilitate a perceptual unboundedness that is at once intercultural, interspecies, and even interstellar. We then unbind the practices from their dominant structures and open space for a much-needed sense of spiritual wonder and discovery.

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The Bible in Shakespeare by Hannibal Hamlin. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2013 (2018 pbk). 378 pp. $34.95 paperback. ISBN: 978-0-19-881741-3.

The plays of William Shakespeare are some of the most studied texts in the academy. Most of us who teach those plays are aware of the fact that the Bible profoundly shaped Shakespeare's world and the context in which his plays were first performed. In both our teaching and our scholarship, however, we are often more likely to discuss classical allusions, ties to contemporary political events, even tantalizing hints at the author's biography, rather than delve into the profound links between Shakespeare's plays and the most widely read book of his era. In today's largely secular world, how do we deal with the tremendous influence of Christian scripture on the Shakespearian canon—a canon that has become perhaps the closest thing we have in our society to an agreed-upon shared heritage? How do we relate the Bible to what has effectively become a secular scripture of the modern world?

Hannibal Hamlin's *The Bible in Shakespeare*, now out in paperback, gives us some guidance. Hamlin reminds us that in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, the Bible was like the most popular television show of all time, only "it was always in reruns, and it never went off the air" (1). Given this pervasiveness of the Bible in Shakespeare's culture, Hamlin's book is certainly not the first work on the Bard's religious allusions, and his second chapter details some of the scholars who have covered similar ground in the past. Many of Hamlin's predecessors, however, have been intent on the impossible task of trying to prove Shakespeare's personal religious beliefs. Thankfully, Hamlin avoids this trap, instead merely showing the variety of biblical allusions in Shakespeare and speculating on how those allusions might have functioned for early modern audiences.

Many of Hamlin's predecessors also tended to quote from the King James Bible. This might seem natural enough, given that translation's status as an authoritative text during the seventeenth century (and beyond). Since the King James Bible was not completed until around the time Shakespeare retired from playwriting, though, its wording could not have influenced many of the plays. Teachers of Renaissance drama should be familiar with the reputation of the Geneva Bible as "Shakespeare's Bible", owing to how closely its language is echoed in his work. Hamlin moves beyond the Geneva Bible, though, to also look at language in the Bishops' Bible (a text more often heard by Shakespeare's audience in church, even if Protestant families were more likely to own a Geneva Bible at home) as well as other translations widely used at the time.

While the first part of the book sets up the various ways Shakespeare uses biblical allusion, the second part presents case studies of different themes and different plays. The first study is an in-depth look at how Shakespeare wrestles with the story of the Fall from Eden. Emphasizing the diversity of allusions to the Fall, Hamlin convincingly argues that different genres—history, comedy, tragedy, and romance—respond to the story of the Fall differently. The next chapter deals head-on with the existence of anachronistic allusions to Christianity, studying Shakespeare's use of biblical allusion in the Roman plays of *Julius Caesar*, *Coriolanus*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Hamlin then moves on to a character who (mis)quotes scripture constantly: Sir John Falstaff. Those familiar with the Oldcastle controversy (wherein there are differing explanations of Shakespeare's alteration of the character Sir John Oldcastle, a rebel and a Lollard, to Falstaff) will be unsurprised to learn that this discussion sheds

considerable light on how Shakespeare engaged with contemporary debates over Puritanism.

The final two chapters each tackle a single play. In "The Great Doom's Vision: *Macbeth* and the Apocalypse" Hamlin explores links between Shakespeare's dark Scottish tragedy and the book of Revelation. Rather than confining himself to the Bible, Hamlin broadens his approach to examine other apocalyptic material inspired by Revelation, including biblical commentaries, Mystery plays, popular poems, and even paintings of the Last Judgment. This method proves to be particularly fruitful, since it shows the reader not just how Shakespeare engaged with a book of the Bible, but how others engaged with that book as well. The same is true of the last chapter, which examines *King Lear* and the story of Job, not just how it was told in the Bible, but how it was retold in plays, sermons, and devotional literature. Without steering the reader to any one reading of *Lear*, Hamlin illuminates how this play with a deliberately pre-Christian setting nonetheless engaged with contemporary Christian debates regarding the nature of suffering.

In his conclusion, Hamlin claims he "tried to write for the educated general reader rather than just an academic community" (335). Given the density of some of the more theoretical parts of the book, I'm not sure how many general readers will want to pick up *The Bible in Shakespeare*. For the most part, though, Hamlin manages to build his arguments with ample examples without becoming tedious or repetitious. Scholars working on Shakespeare will want to utilize the book to quickly reference how Biblical allusions function in some of the Bard's most popular works. Perhaps more importantly, teachers will be able to use Hamlin's insights to guide students through the religious context that informed the writing of so many of Shakespeare's plays. Noticeably absent from this volume is any meaningful discussion of Shakespeare's non-dramatic poems, though Hamlin identifies the sonnets as a potentially "rich ground for exploring biblical allusion" (336). With fewer than 400 pages, the book could hardly offer an exhaustive look at all of Shakespeare's engagement with the biblical tradition. Still, Hamlin has provided those interested in the plays of Shakespeare with useful strategies for thinking about how biblical allusions function on stage, and how understanding those allusions can enrich our understanding of dramatic action. The book is a welcome addition to Shakespeare studies, and could also provide a framework for thinking about other Bible-quoting dramatists as diverse as Christopher Marlowe, Henrik Ibsen, and Samuel Beckett. *The Bible in Shakespeare* shows how even in the secularized space of modern academia, the Bible still matters.

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Liturgical Drama and the Reimagining of Medieval Theater*: *Early Drama, Art, and Music by Michael Norton. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2017. 272 pp. ISBN: 978-1-58044-262-6

Michael Norton's *Liturgical Drama and the Reimagining of Medieval Theater* (Medieval Institute Publications, 2017), examines the relationship between musicology, theatre history and performance studies, using liturgical drama as its case study. As such, it is a

useful intervention into the discussion of theatre as a multi-media artform, as well as the interdisciplinary nature of theatre studies. However, scholars of liturgical drama may find themselves skeptical, as did this reviewer, that the author's conclusions serve the advancement of theatre studies or studies in religion and theatre. While Norton is correct that there are serious gaps and flaws in our contemporary understanding of liturgical drama and its relationship to medieval theatre, his diagnosis does not propose a cure.

Norton straightaway offers what might seem like a surprising thesis: liturgical drama, he says, does not exist. The reason the category continues to be used is due to a series of editorial misunderstandings and authorial mistakes—chiefly by non-musicologists. The first two chapters are an historiographic review of the term liturgical drama. Chapter one looks at its origin in mid-19th century French-language studies on medieval drama and its development through the end of the 1800s. Chapter two looks at developments in English language theatre studies throughout the 20th Century, paying particular interest to the works of E.K. Chambers, Karl Young and O. B. Hardison. Throughout his review, Norton identifies the perpetrators of these mistakes and their misunderstanding of what Norton considers to be the purely metaphorical original use of the term "liturgical drama". In the 1840s French author Charles Magnin supplanted what might be called "the drama of liturgy" with "drama in liturgy." According to Norton, this has resulted in the assumption that liturgical drama is many things that it actually is not, while Norton himself prefers a very narrow definition. For Norton, most theatre history of the 20th century only compounds the error, so that current theatrical research in the area finds only what it wants to see there and refuses to look at the data with an independent eye. Norton's final chapters attempt to set the record straight, confining the definition of liturgical drama to mostly sung ritual elements of church service, devoid of dialogue, with no representation of action or person, costumes, scenery or anything else even vaguely theatrical.

This is a difficult argument to make and Norton does not make it successfully. Scholars and clerics from within the early church—from Eusebius to St. Amalarius of Metz to Honorius of Atun—have acknowledged the fundamentally theatrical nature of Roman Catholic ritual, and it is difficult to discredit the opinions of such men who experienced the rites daily throughout their lives. The fact that Norton does not mention these authors, or only gives them notably short shrift (Honorius' work is discussed in under a page), was enough for this reader to be apprehensive about his conclusions.

Norton employs creative semantic and linguistic gymnastics in order to force the liturgical texts of the period into illustrating his limited definition of "liturgical drama." He creates new terminology to downplay or delete references to overt theatricality: "I will use the term 'represent' rather than 'portray,' 'celebrate' rather than 'perform,' 'in the person of' rather than 'role,' 'vestments' rather than 'costume,' 'movement' rather than 'staging' and so on" (7). These create distinctions without difference, which weakens the impact of his argument, and more significantly ignore the subtleties of the multivalent Latin terms the original authors used. The term "ludus," for example, can mean not only "any type of theatrical performance" but "game," "fun," or "rite".

More profound issues arise deeper in the text, as his academic argument degrades into frustration with theatre and performance scholars. Theatre studies

scholars, as a body, seem to be unfamiliar with the work of C. Clifford Flanagan, Norton's chief source in the idea that liturgical drama, as such, does not exist, and several passages lament this as laziness or self-indulgence. Theatre studies scholars, meanwhile, are apt to feel frustrated with such attacks, especially when Norton seems largely unaware in advances in theatrical studies of liturgical drama after O. B. Hardison's work in the 1960s. A good example of this is the fact that Jody Enders' work *in toto* is mentioned only once (she refers to stage directions as stage directions, to Norton's chagrin), even though she has an entire study on saints' lives plays and liturgical drama.

Though there are serious weaknesses to its thesis, *Liturgical Drama and the Reimaging of Medieval Theatre* is not without merit. Norton is absolutely right to call attention to faults in current practice and methodology in medieval theatre and performance studies. And as a field, we are too reliant on their century-old arguments and understandings in our telling of how theatre originated and grew inside and outside the medieval theatre. As Norton argues, it is indeed problematic that both Chambers and Young follow a teleological model of evolutionary development (Chambers explicitly defines his medieval stage book as a launchpad for a discussion of Shakespeare, as if all of medieval drama existed for no better purpose than to prepare the world for *Hamlet*), that while current for the 20th century, no longer mirrors contemporary evolutionary theory. Rather than a long, slow progression of forms Norton favors, most biologists see evolution occurring in rapid bursts, so Norton is insisting on creating a model on outdated science. Such adherence also denies the complexity of the existing historical record, which shows liturgical drama from the same historical era, sometimes even at the same site, as astoundingly different in terms of length of text and complexity of performance needs (costuming, scenic elements, and dialogue). Norton makes this clear in his reaction, but offers no effective alternative. His criticism of theatre studies as a field, however, is enough to prompt some timely reflection on the central importance of medieval theatre and our critical understanding of it in relationship to Christian liturgy.

In the end, Norton never provides a compelling reason why liturgical drama should be considered solely a rite and never performance. He treats these sacred texts as sacred cows that really ought not to be touched by anyone but trained musicians, but this line of thinking is at odds with the shared communal and celebratory nature of liturgical drama. Demanding, as he does, that there are "right" and "wrong" ways to understand liturgical performances—reducing the study of it to merely prescriptive grammar—does little to understand what religious drama meant for its original audiences or how it conveyed information to them, and so substitutes pedantry for genuine historical understanding.

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Empathy as Dialogue in Theatre and Performance by Lindsay B. Cummings. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2016. 220 pp. €74.96 e-book. ISBN: 978-1-137-59326-9.

Lindsay B. Cummings's *Empathy as Dialogue in Theatre and Performance* offers three ways of examining empathy in theatre: interruption, repetition, and rehearsal (7).

Cummings' driving analogy is dialogue—between characters, playwrights and the community, and between audience and performers. She proposes the term "dialogic empathy" to describe "constant and open-ended engagement, responding and reacting to the other" (6). Cummings calls on the practices of Bertolt Brecht, Augusto Boal, and feminist theatre practitioners like Sue-Ellen Case and Rosemary Malgue to explore performative dimensions of empathy. Each chapter explores a category of dialogic empathy, illustrated by specific works of theatre.

Chapter 2 investigates interruption, an empathetic tool which "may remind the empathizer to pay closer attention to the signals and responses of the other" (40). Interruption is an opportunity to reevaluate biases and assumptions, and re-engage in an active listening process. *Black Watch* (Gregory Burke, 2006), characterized by Cummings as "testimonial-based theatre", was commissioned by the National Theatre of Scotland to chronicle the deployment of the Black Watch Regiment to the Iraq War (45). The play contains two intermingling timelines: the war, and its survivors telling their stories to a writer in a Scotland pub. Cummings asserts that *Black Watch* challenges the comfortable empathy a theatre-goer may feel, even in watching horrific stories. She highlights a scene in which soldiers withhold their emotions by separately executing silent gestural phrases, meaningful only to the person performing it. This interrupts the flow of communication. For Cummings, this scene reminds the audience that there "may be things too personal to share", and that characters are not obligated to offer all they are to the audience (62).

Cummings also sees interruption in a lack of extension of empathy in the musical *BETSY!* (Rogers and Hart, 1926). The show explores the conundrum that may result when one investigates one's cultural heritage and discovers ancestors whose identities and ideals may not match one's own. Betsy, a Latina singer in the Bronx, learns she has Appalachian Scots-Irish ancestors, one of whom sided with the Confederacy. She turns away from the spirit telling the story, refusing to believe. Doing so, she interrupts their dialogue, emphasized by switching to her familiar Spanish, rather than their shared English. Betsy now knows, but cannot accept, or love, this part of her heritage. This interruption causes a Brechtian estrangement, in turn creating space for audience reflection.

In Chapter 3, Cummings examines repetitions as participation in empathy through *EKY: The Robert F. Kennedy Performance Project* (John Malpede and Appalshop, 2010). This project brought together lived experiences of Kentuckians present at RFK's visit in 1968 with their neighbors in 2004, to collectively stage the past in the present. Empathy is encountered as people discover each other as co-creative partners. Cummings writes, "Performance, as an act of repetition, brings the past into the present, reviving what was--or how we imagine or wish the past to have been" (80). The creative process and product of *EKY* is contrasted against a list of politicians, from the 60s to the present, who have used Kentucky as a backdrop for their poverty policies. This political form of repetition is meant to evoke empathy in voters. But these visits are unable to recreate the feelings of hope aroused in 1968, because many politicians lack what the people of Kentucky remember most about RFK: his empathetic, active listening. Repetition is empathy if it duplicates not only the event, but the process that brought it into being.

Cummings's final exploration of empathy is through rehearsal, or a composition of repetitions, in two plays by Naomi Wallace. After a lengthy introduction explaining

the rehearsal processes of Stanislavski and Brecht, Cummings analyzes Wallace's *In the Heart of America* (1994) and *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek* (2001). *In the Heart of America* follows the relationship of two soldiers from their initial meeting, through their friendship, to love, and to destruction. Cummings describes the relationship changes through the concept of rehearsal. She writes, "Remzi and Craer render themselves vulnerable to change not because they risk being invaded by the other's emotion … but because they are willing to *respond* to the other and possibly change in the process" (140, emphasis in original). In this way, they "rehearse the future they are creating" (140). In *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek*, Pace and her friends race an oncoming train, exploring connections between hope and sacrifice, confidence and fear. They rehearse to create a future different from the past. Pace lost one friend trying to outrace a train. She enlists another and makes him rehearse— physically in a dry creek bed, and verbally. She refuses to accept that the same outcome may occur again. In both plays, characters rehearse to remake their worlds, with limited success. This does not make their rehearsing any less valuable. Through rehearsals, their relationships developed. While the characters do not change their worlds, they change themselves.

In Chapter 5, Cummings finds her ideas of interruption, repetition, and rehearsal all in *Journey of Asylum— Waiting* (Catherine Simmonds, 2010). This piece is devised from experiences of multiple refugees and asylum-seekers in Australia. Refugees and asylum-seekers perform every time they tell their stories to a member of the judiciary or press. They perform for their chance at a different life. Their stories are repeated exactly, time and again, as a mistake could cost everything. But when actors perform, they rehearse, and they find empathy for each other, and ask the same of their audience. Cummings concludes, "If we stop thinking of empathy as something that some people feel *for* others and begin to think of it, instead, as something we *do with* others, we encourage deeper engagement…" (190, emphasis original).

Published in 2016, Cummings' text has only grown more relevant, given today's political and cultural milieu, because it is a useful reflection on how performance can create connection and communion. Dialogic empathy is a process of checking assumptions, actively seeing others as partners, and being willing to change ourselves. This requires us to be invested in the humanity of the Other, whether found in the characters we watch or the real people we encounter.

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