

history of Broadway. Examining the engines of commodity circulation within Broadway's early theatre culture, *Transatlantic Broadway* makes an important contribution to theatre and performance studies, American cultural history, histories of capitalism, and studies of print and material culture. By demonstrating that certain behaviors associated with the 24/7 digital age were in place in the pre-World War I era, Schweitzer also offers new perspectives on histories of technology and communication. Essential for scholars and teachers of theatre history, Schweitzer's study prompts readers to envision historiography as competing and overlapping threads or networks. Carefully researched and skillfully theorized, *Transatlantic Broadway* attends to performers, spaces, and archives that have been neglected in previous studies of the theatre, thus encouraging scholars to rethink the literal and disciplinary borders of US theatre history.

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Onnagata: A Labyrinth of Gendering in Kabuki Theater. By Maki Isaka. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2016; pp. xvi + 256, \$50 cloth, \$50 e-book.

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Reviewed by Megan Ammirati, *University of California–Davis*

Maki Isaka's *Onnagata: A Labyrinth of Gendering in Kabuki Theater* approaches the world of Japanese *kabuki* theatre from the perspective of gender studies. The author focuses on *onnagata*—the *kabuki* actors responsible for playing female roles who are often, though not always, men. The book's conclusion is that *onnagata*, male and female alike, construct a version of femininity that is “intricate yet porous, precarious but binding, and codependent on the labyrinths of others” (ix). In short, their act of gendering follows the same logic as pedestrian performances in everyday life. As the author acknowledges in the introduction, such an investigation of *kabuki*'s gender impersonation is well-trod analytical ground in the years since the publication of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*. However, Isaka makes a number of important interventions in understanding how femininity is constructed and presented on the Japanese stage as well as in society as a whole.

First, Isaka intentionally wrestles with well-entrenched academic ideas about *kabuki* theatre's development that, as she argues, are often incorrect, simplified, or based on false premises. For example, she points out that there is no consensus among scholars on the oft-referenced “three-stage trajectory” (17) of *kabuki* history, in which female roles were first played by adult women, then young boys (*wakashu*), and ultimately adult men. Isaka argues that this narrative of evolution—which centers around the question of imitation and the debate about whether biological woman and their femininity are relevant to the *onnagata*'s art—has “misinformed our understanding of *onnagata* artistry and helped thwart career building in this vocation by women” (18) by distancing *kabuki* from the imitation of women. Isaka, uniquely and importantly, goes against such readings by

demonstrating that imitation is “not something to be overcome but [is] the very foundation of the methodology and techniques of *onnagata*” (17).

Isaka goes on to reconsider the history of *onnagata* performance over the past few centuries. The first chapter unpacks the gender identity of early *wakashu* boy actors who were known as *futanarihira* or “androgynous beauties” (15). Chapter 2 parses the transition between this ephemeral aesthetic of boy actors to the lifelong, highly disciplined training of adult *onnagata* meant to prolong an actor’s beauty and femininity indefinitely. The third and fourth chapters then compare two seminal acting treatises from the eighteenth century, “The Words of Ayame” and Kikunōjō’s “Secret Transmissions of an *Onnagata*.” Close reading these prescriptions for performing female roles, Isaka concludes that both writers describe a spectrum in which masculinity and femininity are located on the two extremes, a system that resembles the understanding of gender in twentieth-century Japan (48). Because this system imagines that male *onnagata* present femininity onstage by distancing themselves from their own masculinity, women were ultimately excluded from the art. Over the course of its rewriting of history, *Onnagata* thus narrates a development in gender performance in which “[o]nnagata transformed their gender from military masculinity to the androgynous gender and then to ideal femininity” (23). Instead of using the sex and age of actors to describe the “three-stage trajectory” (17) of *kabuki*, Isaka’s narrative focuses on the ideological and rhetorical underpinnings of *kabuki*’s methodology for performing gender.

Among the most notable inclusions in Isaka’s reenvisioned theatre history is the discussion in Chapter 7 of female *kabuki* actors such as Kumehachi in conjunction with their predecessor *okyōgenshi*, or theatre masters. Isaka explains her purpose in introducing this topic “is not so much to supplement *kabuki* historiography as to explore and expose what was made abjected and sacrificed for the sake of a system as a whole” (19). Her conclusion is that these female artists were excluded from traditional histories because they could perform believably as *onnagata*, a fact that was counter to the traditions of *onnagata* art that had been established since the eighteenth century as well as the understanding of gendered performance in Meiji-era (late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century) Japanese society (137).

The book’s exploration of gender performance goes far beyond the worlds of dramatic literature and theatrical performance. Isaka covers the experience of *kabuki* in understudied forms of print media such as actor-critique books and playbills, extending the issues of citation, imitation, and transmission of a body of knowledge into a consideration of society at large (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 delves into questions of how the body is naturalized by examining performance techniques such as the *nanba* gait and “puppet-gesture” (*ningyōburi*). Finally, Isaka extends the book’s theses about the constructed nature of gender and performance to the theatre community’s tradition of adoption and the participation of *onnagata* in the contemporary commercial makeup business (Chapter 8).

True to its subtitle, the monograph is a labyrinth. Most of the time, the fluid and ambitious nature of the project is its strongest suit. That being said, there are moments where the book’s complex structure becomes sprawling. *Onnagata: A Labyrinth of Gendering in Kabuki Theater* is therefore best read as a whole,

allowing its central inquiry—“who is made to pay the price for establishing, naturalizing, and maintaining a system” (ix)—to find resonance among the impressive and diverse array of genres and cultural practices it addresses.

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The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary South African Theatre. Edited by Martin Middeke, Peter Paul Schnierer, and Greg Homann. Guides to Contemporary Drama. London and New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015; pp. vii + 384. \$122 cloth, \$39.95 paper, \$32.99 e-book.

Imagining the Edgy City: Writing, Performing, and Building Johannesburg. By Loren Kruger. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013; pp. xxv + 274, 22 illustrations. \$78 cloth, \$77.99 e-book.

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South African theatre first came to international prominence with apartheid-era protest performance in the 1970s and 1980s. As the rich bibliography surrounding and frequent revivals of these now canonical plays attest, South Africa’s antiapartheid narrative of oppression and resilience continues to resonate for both scholarly and theatregoing audiences. However, *postapartheid* performances have yet to receive the same level of theorization as apartheid-era struggle plays. The reasons for this gap are manifold. Whereas the struggle to end apartheid had a clear antagonist and moral drive, the contemporary moment—challenged by crime, HIV, economic inequality, and entrenched racism—has muddied the national narrative. Much contemporary South African performance deals with what occurs after the fight for liberation has been won and people have to learn to live with each other. As the terrain of contemporary South African theatre and performance continues to develop, two recent texts, *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary South African Theatre* (2015) and Loren Kruger’s *Imagining the Edgy City: Writing, Performing, and Building Johannesburg* (2013), provide differing cartographic approaches to bridging the gap in postapartheid performance studies. *The Methuen Drama Guide* brings compelling theatre and performance from the past twenty years under scholarly study, and the editors gather an impressive array of primarily South African scholars and theatre practitioners to reflect on themes and aesthetics emerging in more than a hundred plays. Kruger, by contrast, delves deeply into the history of the performative texts surrounding a single case study: Johannesburg. Taken together, these books offer a thorough account of how theatre and performance continue to reflect and rehearse visions of nationhood.

The Methuen Drama Guide arguably provides the most complete overview of postapartheid theatre to date. The book is organized into two parts: “Overview Essays” and “Playwrights.” Part I provides necessary context through essays that highlight how South Africa’s particular history has led to a robust tradition of