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Reviews: Australian Plays for the Colonial Stage 1834-1899 edited by Richard Fotheringham, 2006

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key elements of opera (such as, of all things, the music, how the different factors listed actually worked together and their aesthetic effect) is therefore understandable. Given this framework and approach, the book is an invaluable and unique source on the commercial aspect of Venetian public opera in the mid-seventeenth century.

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Australian Plays for the Colonial Stage 1834–1899. Edited by **Richard Fotheringham**. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2006. Pp. lxxxvi + 732 + 30 illus. AUS$175 Hb; AUS$99.95 Pb.

Reviewed by Louise D'Arcens, University of Wollongong

This volume offers an extremely valuable collection of nine nineteenth-century plays whose content engaged specifically with representations of life in the Australian colonies. Running the gamut of popular genres from melodrama to burletta, pantomime and masque, these plays' significance lies in their reflection of 'popular myths and . . . mass enthusiasms and anxieties' (p. lxxvii) around such ideologically charged themes as bushranging, pioneering, indigenous Australia, urban life and convictism. It is this that warrants their resurrection in this volume, for, as Fotheringham points out, they were not necessarily representative of the colonial Australian theatre industry, dominated as it was by localized versions of British drama. Indeed, while two of the plays, *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1886) and *The Kelly Gang* (1899), were widely performed, others included here received a few performances at most, and one of them, *Life in Sydney* (1843), was censored and never performed.

Fortuitously, the very process that prevented its performance also preserved the play's only extant manuscript, and it is on such unique sources that Fotheringham bases a number of his editions. For those unfamiliar with how colonial Australia saw itself onstage, this volume offers a comprehensive introduction. For more expert readers it offers editions of four previously unpublished plays, and meticulous editions of the remaining five, including parallel Sydney and Melbourne editions of W. M. Akhurst's pantomime *The House that Jack Built* (1869/71). The volume's general introduction provides an extremely helpful guide to the colonial Australian theatre industry. Here Fotheringham situates theatre within the more complex framework of colonial material culture, drawing out its relationships with domestic fashion and commodity trends, with leisure activities such as horse-racing and balls, and with civic events such as grand exhibitions. The major figures and events in colonial theatrical history are mentioned, albeit briefly.

Fotheringham's eye for memorable anecdote leavens his condensed historical account, bringing to life the vibrancy of this scene but also its ongoing struggle to survive under hostile economic and social conditions. This account is continued in shorter introductions to each of the plays, which detail their immediate contexts and their performance histories. The volume's appendix of music used in these plays, edited by Angela Turner, details the ways they adapted popular contemporary music, while the inclusion of actress postcards and illustrations of productions in local periodicals shows

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us how theatre culture was represented in other popular media. The author also includes newspaper illustrations depicting the colonial urban leisure and commodity cultures he outlines in his introduction.

Despite its length, this volume rewards a complete reading by offering a compelling cumulative picture of the theatre's role in reflecting colonial Australia's self-perception. The thorough treatment of the individual texts, however, also makes stand-alone readings of the separate plays possible, making this a volume for experts and non-experts alike, a terrific resource for theatre studies and Australian studies.

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Staging Motherhood: British Women Playwrights, 1956 to the Present. By **Jozefina Komporaly**. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. Pp. xii + 208 + 4 illus. £45/$74.95 Hb.

Reviewed by Carina Bartleet, University of Reading

This new book on the representation of motherhood on the British stage is an exploration of the visions of the maternal presented by women playwrights and theatre practitioners from 1956 to the present day. The author's study is broadly feminist in remit in its aim to 'analyse the ways in which transformations in women's personal and public lives have impacted women's theatre' (p. 1). Through exploration of drama authored by women, Komporaly argues that many of the themes and political concerns of the feminist dramatists of the second wave of feminism is anticipated in plays from the 1950s and, furthermore, that some women playwrights writing more recently have 'revisit[ed] the seventies' (ibid.).

It is one of the real strengths of this book that it covers an impressive range of plays. After a short introduction setting out the study's methodology in a clear manner, the reader is launched into a consideration of the earliest plays to be featured – those that the author argues are, in their depictions of the maternal, proto-feminist precursors to later works. The organizing principle of the book is thematic rather than chronological, however; subjects including female professional success, mothers versus daughters, teenage mothers, lesbianism, infertility, adoption, technology and maternal desire are surveyed. Komporaly is meticulous in her attempt to document the range of representations of the maternal and this is manifest in the methodology, which privileges the survey of a large number of plays with some theory over an in-depth theoretical exploration of a few plays. The final chapters and conclusions question the category of motherhood and open out the subject to an investigation of parenting. Thus many of the women's theatre 'canonicals' are present, including Wertenbaker, Churchill, Daniels and Delaney, but the study also offers insight into less frequently discussed plays by Enid Bagnold, Grace Dayley and Trish Cooke, as well as recent performance pieces by Anna Furse and Sarah Woods.

As it stands, the study is an invaluable survey of how motherhood has been represented in women's writing for the theatre during the last fifty years. It is an impressive introduction to the topic, and offers a discussion of rare material for those specializing in post-1956 British theatre or theatre by women.

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