University of Groningen

Fischer--Lichte, Erika, Tragedy's Endurance: Performances of Greek Tragedy and Cultural Identity in Germany

Ioannidou, Eleftheria

Published in:
New Theatre Quarterly

DOI:
[10.1017/S0266464X18000672](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X18000672)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2019

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Ioannidou, E. (2019). Fischer--Lichte, Erika, Tragedy's Endurance: Performances of Greek Tragedy and Cultural Identity in Germany. *New Theatre Quarterly*, 35(1), 93-94.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X18000672>

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

language productions that have staged the problems of belonging, prejudice, and in particular the issues related to dispossession.

Wilmer draws on biopolitical theories of bare life (Agamben, Butler, and Foucault) to sketch the problems attendant on people fleeing persecution and threat and who must then survive in challenging conditions elsewhere. However, there are some surprising omissions in the attendant literatures on refugee performance, most notably the significant work of UK-based scholars Emma Cox, Marilena Zaroulia, and Alison Jeffers, whose works have set the parameters of how performance stages refugeeism.

This leads to a central concern about the work: namely, for a volume that claims to be 'about' performing statelessness, there is little to indicate what Wilmer understands statelessness to mean. There is a sense of conflation between 'refugee', 'asylum seeker', and even unwed Irish mother and statelessness – a condition under which one is not recognized as a national under state law.

Wilmer's focus on Irish Magdalene laundries considers immersive theatre approaches by Anu (Laundry, 2011). The attendant access to contexts, histories, and stages of dispossession in these examples is interesting, but it is ultimately unclear as to how it relates to the whole argument. While there is much to be lauded in the scope of the performance examples explored in the book, these conflations render it surprisingly lacking in politics. This is unfortunate, as performance analyses of relations between whose lives matter, how states treat the most marginal, and the complex machinations of subjecthood under the state are sorely needed.

Chapter Two explores how productive ancient Greek drama has been for the exploration of tragic conditions of refugees, (in)hospitality, and trauma. The focus here is less on staging than adaptation – in particular valuable attention to Jelinek's renowned production of *The Suppliants*. Chapter Three furthers an engaging proposition that fictionalized accounts animate a 'performative identification', enacting a sense of encounter between citizens and non-citizens.

Where the book is most productive is in its contextualization of significant works and their reception. The final chapter on the institutional response of German theatre – despite conflation between immigration and statelessness – outlines the importance of mainstream theatres' contribution to national debates about migration, nationhood and Europe. As a wide-ranging examination of artists that investigates states, citizenship, and the refugee in performance, this work offers access to many under-explored productions and would be valuable to those new to refugee performance, or readers with an interest in histories of representation of Europe's moral 'crisis'.

AYLWYN WALSH

doi:10.1017/S0266464X18000672

Erika Fischer-Lichte

Tragedy's Endurance: Performances of Greek Tragedies and Cultural Identity in Germany since 1800

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. 398p. £80. ISBN: 978-0-19-96516-4.

Performances of Greek tragedy in the modern era, far from being acts of interpretation of the classical texts, bear witness to their historical and cultural contexts. Fischer-Lichte's book mobilizes the theoretical tools she has developed as part of her lifelong contribution to theatre studies and her interest in the transformative power of the theatrical performance. *Tragedy's Endurance*, then, is a cultural history of Germany written through the lens of theatre.

Spanning the period 1800 to 2015, the book makes a compelling case for Philhellenism as integral to German cultural identity, focusing on theatrical performances which shaped the classical imaginings of the educated middle class (*Bildungsbürgertum*). The corpus of theatrical productions discussed guides the reader through the transformations of the middle class in Germany. In its continuities, ruptures, and dark moments, this is a fascinating history.

Fischer-Lichte examines Goethe and Schiller's turn to Greek antiquity to materialize their ideas of aesthetic education. The foreignness of Greek tragedy which characterized their project reappears in the 1841 production of *Antigone* in Potsdam. Nietzsche's redefinition of tragedy and Wagner's vision of the total artwork offered an image of antiquity which challenged canonized classical style alongside the *Bildungsbürgertum*'s sense of identity. Reinhardt's Theatre of the Five Thousand took recourse to tragedy to overcome the individuation prevailing in modernity; and Fischer-Lichte sees Reinhardt as successfully forging theatrical communities which were not meant to outlive the performance event. His use of tragedy appealed to the Nazi regime as a means of consolidating an ideological community.

Theatre makers in the early post-war period used tragedy to contemplate issues of collective guilt but nonetheless made an appeal to the universality of the texts. Brecht's 1946 *Antigone* as a model for epic theatre tackled guilt without affording audiences any emotional relief. The radical readings of tragedy proposed by directors in the politically turbulent 1960s–1980s interrogated German identification with Greek culture or, in Grüber and Stein's *Antikenprojekt I and II*, emphasized the inaccessibility of Greek tragedy in order to reflect on the relationship between past and present.

The choral speaking in Schleef's *Die Mütter* cracks open an aesthetics associated with the Nazi

era to restore theatre as a communal ritual with healing properties.

The epilogue discusses the internationalization of Greek tragedy within festival frameworks and its significance for the self-definition of German audiences, closing with Fabre's *Mount Olympus* (2015) and offering a comment on the state of in-betweenness characterizing identities in the contemporary world.

Fischer-Lichte considers an impressive range of intellectual material which allows her to view productions against ideological, political, and cultural tensions, while foregrounding the role of the performance medium as a dynamic process which affects audiences. The thread of argument never forgoes a high-cultural focus, validating a German identity which appears to be largely homogeneous. The question arises as to whether encounters with classical antiquity which happened on the fringes of established institutions offered space for alternative identities to emerge. The discussion of Neuenfels's 1976 *Medea* in the context of public debates on female rights and self-determination certainly points in that direction. This book will have a lasting impact, not least in prompting new research into antiquity within but also beyond high-art contexts.

ELEFThERIA IOANNIDOU

doi:10.1017/S0266464X18000684

Gerald Siegmund

Jérôme Bel: Dance, Theatre, and the Subject

London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. 286 p. £80.

ISBN 978-1-137-55271-6.

French choreographer Jérôme Bel's works operate at the same time in the centre of thinking about dance and theatre and at its very periphery, resisting *their own subjects* (as in: what they are about), and resisting *being subjected to them* (as in: being invisible as representations). Instead of following the rules of the game/theatre/dance and creating a new variation for each performance, Bel's works actually attempt to create rules anew, but in such a way that they can't ever be applied again. Watching his performances often feels like watching a utopia of ultimate emancipation (of performers, of the author, of the audience, of theatre and dance itself), on the very verge of a horrible flop.

In this monograph on Bel, which follows his career from its beginnings in 1994 until 2016, Gerald Siegmund locates Bel's central question: what does it mean to be subjected to the regime of theatre and dance and, further, how does subjectification operate within those frames? Starting and ending with *Gala* (2015), Siegmund reads Bel's works as enquiries into attempts and strategies of emancipation from the relentless logic of representation, as pieces which often walk on a

thin line in danger of canonizing new strategies of oppression.

The book is organized partly as an historical, partly as a theoretical inquiry into Bel's opus, its logic, and the background it is constituted *against*. The first exploration of how subjectification operates for Bel's works is posited in relation to the history of modern dance and to its medium specificity (and could have profited from Sally Banes' and Noël Carroll's distinction between two types of avant-garde, purist and integrationist). What follows is a questioning of the discourse of theatricality and discourse *as* theatricality.

The third chapter deals with absent subjects and absence as a critical category. The fourth focuses on concrete subjects – Véronique Doisneau, Cédric Andrieux, Lutz Förster, and Pichet Klunchun – as/in performances, professional dancers, and the regimes they were subjected to, or institutions they worked in, while always questioning how these regimes operate as systems – or (and I agree with Siegmund) failing to do so in the case of Förster, thus, regardless of Förster's fascinating performance, failing Bel's concept.

Siegmund's book is a finely nuanced, accessible, and thoughtful analysis of Bel's opus, which has marked two decades of contemporary avant-garde thinking about dance theatre. This is particularly visible in the fifth chapter, where he deals with *Disabled Theatre* (2012), perhaps Bel's most theoretically and politically fragile piece. Namely, Siegmund brilliantly deflects the discussion from the obvious question of the representation of disability on stage, and reads *Disabled Theatre* as 'an investigation into the myths and ideology of modern dance and theatre'. In Siegmund's interpretation, the book is rather 'a meta/critique of Bel's critique of dance', which reads the piece's political stance as in its 'undoing form while displaying a form', rather than in questioning identity politics.

UNA BAUER

doi:10.1017/S0266464X18000696

Vera Cantoni

New Playwriting at Shakespeare's Globe

London: Bloomsbury Methuen, 2018. 256 p.

£75.00.

ISBN: 978-1-474-29824-7.

There are plenty of books focused on performing at Shakespeare's Globe; however, this study takes a distinctive approach which makes it largely cohesive and original. Cantoni provides a critical perspective that benefits from access to the prompt books, rehearsal drafts, and playwrights of the institution between 1999 and 2015. The book is unusual, therefore, in its close study of 27 plays. This kind of corpus analysis can be very