

Editorial

All things exist as they are perceived: at least in relation to the percipient.¹

Before you came here, you made certain preparations. You came here with certain preconceptions. [...] You were prepared to sit and having something shown to you.²

In May 2007, Royal Holloway hosted a one-day symposium, entitled “How do we Receive Reception?” Seeking to address theoretical and methodological questions about theatre reception, the papers and round table discussion at the symposium highlighted the diversity and complexity of the discourses surrounding these questions. The current issue of *Platform* was therefore conceived of as an attempt to consider some of these complexities in further detail. Our call for papers, which asked for an engagement with the idea of “reception” prompted a range of responses which approach this broad concept from a number of perspectives, using varied methodologies.

The papers in this issue, then, are linked by their starting point, and all shed light on particular elements of theatre reception. At the heart of each paper lies an impassioned urge to connect with the theatrical moment, to engage with the work as experienced, to consider and critique the conditions of production, to cross borders and, in doing so, to engage with the issue of reception. But, from thereon in, their remits, approaches, and conclusions are diverse and tread no specific “line.”

“Translating In? Brian Friel’s *Translations* in Irish-language Performance,” by Nóra de Buiteléir, looks at the problems and ramifications of cultural transfer and translation. Examining the reception of two Irish-language productions of Friel’s play, de Buiteléir addresses the ways in which the act of translation has political and ideological agendas, which, along with other cultural contexts, condition and impact on the reception of the piece. Using close textual analysis of the ways in which a translation might attempt to configure or reconfigure a play linguistically, and critically assessing the responses of critics to the productions she addresses, de Buiteléir’s paper looks at the status of language and the cultural, political construction of artistic “value.”

The second paper, “Pumpkin Fruit / Pumpkin Root: Participatory Theatre in a Ugandan Prison,” is a practice-based piece, in which Kevin Bott narrates the development of an original, collaborative piece of theatre in a prison setting. Using a pumpkin metaphor to illuminate the process of the creation and the production of the piece, the author offers an insight of his own experience as the “other,” as well as the impact of the experience on the inmates. Reception, here, is about process rather than performance; both to do with the personal engagement of Bott as a practitioner, and with the reception of theatrical workshops within sensitive, community-based settings.

Patrick Duggan’s “Feeling Performance, Remembering Trauma” also engages with his case studies in a personal way, but from the audience’s perspective. Drawing on trauma theory and its relation to theatre, he discusses the impact of trauma – whether real or representational – on the audience member. His paper is an individual, specific reading of theatrical events: his focus is on Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* and Kira O’Reilly’s *Untitled (Syncope)*, and he uses his own “reception” of these pieces to

¹ Percy Bysshe Shelley, “A Defense of Poetry,” *Shelley: Selected Poetry, Prose and Letters* (London: The Nonesuch P) 1025.

² Peter Handke, *Offending the Audience. Plays 1* (London: Methuen, 1997) 21.

address the ways in which the visceral nature of live performance might create a space for an exploration of the difficulties of traumatic experience.

In “The Reception of Oscar Wilde and Bernard Shaw in the Light of Early Twentieth-Century Austrian Censorship,” Sandra Mayer and Barbara Pfeifer remind us that reception is an historical, textual issue as well as a contemporary practical one. Using unpublished archival sources, their paper seeks to address issues of cultural transfer, as they shed light on the reception and censorship of the works of Wilde and Shaw in Austria. Their work considers the mechanisms of circulation and the practices of censorship, and highlights the ways in which the movement of plays into new cultural contexts has been conditioned and controlled. The archival sources demonstrate the ways in which reception is a shifting process, raising questions about the ways in which cultures and contexts contact and conflict with one another.

Finally, Jim Ellison’s “Small Town Montréal: Critical Preconceptions and the (mis)Interpretation of Michel Tremblay’s *Hosanna*” demonstrates that these issues of cultural transfer are not just historical. As in de Buitelér’s paper, the act of translation, and the critical responses to a work as it shifts contexts, are shown to be fraught and problematic. Using the first production of Tremblay’s *Hosanna* in Britain, and critically assessing the ways in which the piece was produced and received by the critics, Ellison’s paper highlights the fact that preconceptions and cultural stereotypes often condition the reception of a piece as it crosses linguistic and geographical borders, and encourages an active and critical response to the issue of reception.

As editors, we are immensely happy to be publishing such a varied collection of articles. Moving from the practice-based to the archival, from the reading of the review to the reading of the performance, crossing all sorts of boundaries on the way, these pieces take our initial call for papers and respond in strikingly passionate, diverse ways. In attempting to critically articulate the interaction of cultural, political and ideological contexts, and the personal or individual experience, they engage with a multiplicity of issues surrounding theatre’s reception.

As always, we would like to thank the Department of Drama and Theatre at Royal Holloway, Palgrave, Routledge, Intellect Books, the University of Minnesota Press and everyone who has contributed to the realisation of this issue.

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