
Russell West. *Spatial Representations and the Jacobean Stage: From Shakespeare to Webster*. New York: Palgrave, 2002. Pp. x, 276. \$US 65.00

This book opens by stating the premise on which it is based—that an adequate interpretation of early modern drama must necessarily take into account the spatial context in which it was originally performed. Developing this argument, West explores the interaction of the spatial aspects of the theatre—both its textual, thematic concerns with space and the spatial dimensions of drama as an art form—in their interaction with the social context of the Jacobean period (1603–1625). He points out that “many of the controversial social and political questions in debate were issues of space: questions of enclosure, of rural unemployment and vagrancy, of social mobility, of relationships between court, country and city” (3) and that inherent in these tensions are the antinomic desires for mobility and flexibility versus fixed and rigid social structures. Since Jacobean drama often refers to various sides of these issues, as well as to those whose interests were at stake in them, the drama itself participated in these debates. In addition to these thematic concerns, West maintains, early modern drama frequently references its own spatial nature. Since the tensions of early modern society, a society that believed in social and cosmic hierarchies, were often conceived of spatially, and since the theatre both articulated and commented on the tensions of society, the theatre occupied a position simultaneously within and without social change, able to both take part in conflicts and criticize them.

West claims that his book fills a void in Renaissance theatre studies, which has not followed the broader theoretical interest in investigating the spatial aspects of social life that has emerged since the Second World War. Initiated by the French philosophers Bachelard, Lefebvre, and Foucault, this interest in conceiving of social phenomenon spatially has affected almost every aspect of the human sciences. Until then, space had been thought of as a container that could be filled, and was “stable, homogenous, empty and neutral” (West 4). In contrast, when the theory of relativity, as well as other advances in the social sciences in twentieth century, brought the fixed, consistent nature of space into question, space came to be seen as being constituted by, rather than pre-existing, social structures. West refers to Lefebvre, who theorizes that “each historical period, characterized by particular social forms, particular modes of production, and particular political conflicts, expresses these social structures in corresponding spatial configurations of private dwellings, public spaces, buildings, or the spatial movements of its subjects; changes

in social modes of production engender new spatial arrangements” (4). For West, the result of this theoretical impetus is an eruption of theorizing on the spatial aspects of social life, to which the objection has been made that if everything can be conceived of as a spatial phenomenon, then the concept of space has come to mean nothing. West, however, sees the problem as being not the meaninglessness of the term, but the vagueness with which it is applied. Since the objects to which spatial theorization can be applied are limitless, the term needs to be defined in a way specific to each case. Consequently, this book does not limit itself to a single definition of space but continuously redefines the notion in order to investigate multiple aspects of the spatial dimensions of social reality. Yet despite this shifting definition, the spatial signifying practice of the theatre underlies all notions of space throughout the book.

According to scholarship since the Prague structuralist theatre analysts, the spatial signifying practice of the theatre involves a process of spatial semiosis; almost every part of a performance—“stage design, scenery, lighting, actor positioning with respect to the audience and with respect to other actors, gesture and mime, vice projection, costuming” and even the text—has a spatial aspect that contributes to the production of meaning (6). Further, there is a “primary sign-system” of “iconic” stage signs that mimic entities existing outside of the theatre, but, since, unlike in film, there is no camera to mediate between the viewer and this primary sign-system, a secondary system is needed to make connections between elements of the primary system. This secondary system functions via indexical signs, which, “following Pierce’s famous definition, creates relationships of causality” (6), or spatially foregrounds certain signs in order to suggest a relationships between signs. While some criticism has taken up the role of space in Renaissance Literature, this approach has not been explored in relation to Renaissance theatre. West attempts to fill this void by taking the material and spatial existence of the sign as the central theoretical principle of his book. He claims that his book takes up

de Saussure’s founding assumption regarding the materiality of the sign[.] . . . that signification, far from transparently communicating reality, has its own substance and consistence, its own rules of operation; signification is a material practice which is no less productive than the worldly processes which it ‘mediates’ and thus makes available for reception by perceiving subjects. (7–8)

In taking this theoretical basis, his book addresses a significant as yet unaddressed question of theatre semiotics: it articulates “the material processes of semiosis on the stage upon the thematic and narrative content of the drama

on the one hand, and the context of production on the other" (8). Rather than unsystematically imposing a contemporary conception of space onto the drama of a period that pre-existed these notions, West believes that the contemporary rethinking of space only now makes it possible to understand earlier aspects of these plays.

The first chapter is intended to prevent grafting contemporary notions of space onto Renaissance texts by examining the ways that thought, speech, communication, and social identity were conceived of topographically or spatially in early modern England. The remainder of the book examines various aspects of the spatial nature of social life in early modern England, or rather in its drama. Chapter two examines court masques as the staging of a stable universe or spatial realm over which the monarch ruled, or as was increasingly the case in the masques later in James's reign, failed to control. Chapter three describes the inherent spatial dynamics of incipient capitalism: fluidity (the exchange of one thing for another) and social mobility, as well as the theatre's own position as a market commodity. Social mobility as it affected social identity is examined further in chapter four, and chapter five explores the threat posed to the social order by vagrants, who had left their socially determined place in the countryside due to shifting economic circumstances, as well as the association commonly made between vagrants and players (also mobile, masterless men). Chapter six focuses on travel drama as it represents the potentially subversive process of defamiliarization of one's original place that occurs retrospectively from the perspective of a new place. The final chapter looks at the effects of economic and geographic mobility on individual identity, which came to be thought of less as determined by one's place in a hierarchy and more as a space contained by boundaries and possessed by the individual, who could determine its nature. This section proves valuable in that it poses a counter claim to Greenblatt's conception of identity as self-fashioned: whereas for Greenblatt self-fashioning was always though not exclusively grounded in language, for West it is always though not exclusively grounded in the spatial transformations of social reality (217).

West's analysis takes examples from a wide range of materials including not only prominent plays, but also those that are less studied. The result is a strong analysis which draws attention to subtly varied notions of space that underlie the plays and connect them to the context in which they were performed—connections that, from our modern perspective, are far from obvious. Perhaps the best example is his description of how the association of players with vagrancy influenced the semiotic mobility of players on stage, who acted out a social mobility corresponding to their actual spatial vagrancy (168). Yet despite this book's strengths, West fails to avoid what he himself

identifies as a weakness of theatre studies—their over reliance on textual and thematic rather than spatial and material aspects—though this weakness can be expected as a result of the scarcity of surviving information on the spatial characteristics of performances. Nevertheless, in working out the ways in which the theatre, as a predominantly spatial art form, simultaneously comments on and participates in some of the most pressing debates of the period, this book will be especially useful to those interested in the position of the theatre in early modern social reality.

Karen Walker

Rocío G. Davis and Rosalía Baena, eds. *Tricks with a Glass: Writing Ethnicity in Canada*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000. Pp. xxiv, 301. US\$23 pb.

Tricks with a Glass consists of an Introduction, fourteen essays, and two interviews that attempt to investigate what Rocío Davis calls “the diverse ways in which Canadian writers have negotiated identity and space in terms of the realities of ethnicity” (xiii). The essays analyze literary texts by writers such as Michael Ondaatje, Neil Bissoondath, Rohinton Mistry, Nino Ricci, Antonine Maillet, Janice Kulyck Keefer (who also contributes an memoir/essay to the volume), Rudy Wiebe, SKY Lee, Joy Kogawa, Lee Maracle, and Rachna Mara; the two interviews, which function as a coda to the volume, provide a sympathetic and resonant dialogue between Rocío Davis and Wayson Choy and a somewhat flat exchange between Rosalía Baena and Linda Hutcheon. The collection ranges widely and eclectically over contemporary Canadian writing almost exclusively in English: white ethnic writers, writers of colour, First Nations writers, and francophone Acadian writer Maillet (the only writer in French discussed in the volume)—all fall within the bounds of this volume’s investigation of “ethnicity in Canada.” Despite being published in Europe, the collection follows the prevailing biases of English literary studies in Canada by proceeding as if Québec does not exist.

In such an eclectic collection, one might reasonably expect the Introduction to make sense of the topics addressed and the possible theoretical or conceptual issues under investigation. Davis asserts in the Introduction that “The conceptualization of ethnicity is currently undergoing a radical change based upon the increasingly complex politics of representation,” but she sidesteps a further theorization of this “radical change” through an appeal to plurality: what Davis calls “The multifarious ways in which ethnicity is registered