

as those formulated by Jacques Rancière and Walter Benjamin. Clearly, this leads to an entirely different type of argument that makes active mediation and subversion less likely.

Portmann's argument is most vulnerable when it ventures into one-dimensional political readings of isolated elements of the *Hamlet* productions. Suggesting that in Jovanović's production six ghosts accompanying the Ghost of Hamlet's father necessarily refer to the six republics of former Yugoslavia (83) or that in Pandur's production of Pedro Calderon de la Barca's *La vida es sueño* as Hamlet's mousetrap has to do with the revival of Catholicism in Slovenia (194) means pushing the argument beyond what it can yield and would certainly need additional evidence.

In addition to this intrinsic tension between staging political and theatrical memories, the reader may get perplexed by a few other idiosyncrasies, for instance the somewhat outdated Structuralist apparatus that categorizes analytic findings according to predetermined levels and relatively frequent misspellings of South Slavonic words (especially proper names).

Nevertheless, none of these quirks can obscure the key qualities of Portmann's book: a thoughtful, interdisciplinary theoretical framework, a balanced approach to the conflicting memory discourses of Yugoslavia and an empathetic, comprehensive reconstruction of historical stage productions of *Hamlet*. Above and beyond its immediate context, the book will appeal to scholars of theater, performance, and memory studies. It is to Portmann's credit that she has outlined the areas for the future research of *Hamlet* productions: transnational exchanges, gendered memories, and institutionalization through festivals.

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Subversive Stages: Theater in Pre- and Post-Communist Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. By Ileana Alexandra Orlich. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2017. xx, 217 pp. Bibliography. Index. \$50.00, hard bound.
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I approached the invitation to review this book with some interest. "Subversive Stages" suggested to me that we would have a survey of the ways in which, as the cover suggested, "theatre practices in communist and post-communist, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria" had contributed to the fall of communism in its productions in the three countries isolated. This is something that is well needed. As I read, however, I found that "subversive stages" actually meant a set of play texts, and that "exploring theatre practices in communist and post-communist Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria" actually meant an analysis of selected play texts. Furthermore, as I read there was no analysis of any theater practices, but a set of close examinations of these texts, accompanied by some really valuable insights into the cultural conditions in the various countries that had controlled the writers concerned.

As I read on I began to realize that the book had been written by a practitioner and teacher of comparative literature, which gave the clue as to why I was beginning to find it a little frustrating because, although the choices, historical insights, and juxtapositions were fascinating, they were all seen from the point of view of the playwright rather than the practitioners—actors and directors—who must have made the chosen texts live on stage. I then realized that, in the world of this author's perceptions, "stages" meant the play texts that the author had chosen as representative of dissent. There was no particular reason given as to why these particular writers or these countries had

been chosen or why the major idea of the book to relate the contemporary to the past was considered important. Then, as I read, I realized that I was now in an academic world where a play text is simply considered as a work of literature. This is an age-old argument, but from where I come from in the world of theater practice with a long-held interest in the theater of eastern Europe, the “play” does not exist until it is realized on stage or wherever the director has chosen to show it. This was especially important in the communist theater of the countries of the former eastern Europe, where the stage was often the space where dissent could be experienced, even if this was often disguised by classical texts. The mere fact of speaking lines alters how the text is heard. The visual framework in which it is set also alters and controls how the meaning is received by the audience. The view of the director and actors who bring the text to life is therefore crucial in conveying meaning, which is why Shakespeare’s texts are interpreted so widely and with a certain freedom. There is no way in which the reader should experience such texts as purely literary constructs although play texts are of course published as acts of literature to be interpreted by others.

I am sure Ileana Alexandra Orlich is well aware of this argument, in which case the title of the book can be seen to be misleading and its claim to explore theater practices a bit presumptuous. The position where I come from, to be clear, is that the play text is regarded as a possible set of instructions for performance; that the text itself is, by implication, a suggestion of possibilities for the act of performance, which involves the crucial intervention of the director and performers to realize the text in performance. Orlich chooses to ignore this theatrical distinction, however, in favor of simply accepting theatrical texts as literature, which in my view is the overriding problem. Of course, it is possible to regard play texts as literature, thus avoiding the pretense that you are talking about stages or theater practices, unless you regard the writing of the play as a stage practice in itself!

Thus, as I read, I understood that the term “stages” in the context of this book and this academic world, curiously, means only theater texts, and that in this world the intervention of the theater director and actors do not figure. Thus, the book cannot tell us who the first performers and directors of each of these texts were, neither can we know where they were performed, when, and above all, the reactions of the audiences. How do we judge that these texts were in fact subversive in performance? I looked in vain for any record of the work of the directors I know in the countries covered by the book—Silviu Purcărete in Romania, Alexander Morfov in Bulgaria, or Béla Pintér in Hungary. Why else do we talk of Peter Brook’s “*Midsummer Night’s Dream*,” or Purcărete’s “*Faust*?” Who, for example, directed the texts by Vişniec or Ilaru, which Orlich discusses, and how did these directors interpret the texts? This for me would have been a worthwhile examination that would have recognized that the director’s view might well illuminate the text as well as recording its reception by audiences.

The book is something of a disappointment that might have confined its content to its very interesting examination of the political and cultural contexts in which these countries had to exist during the communist period. Postcommunist practices in eastern Europe are well documented in the book edited by Iulia Popovici and published by Cartier in Bucharest in 2014, which Orlich might well now consult.

In many ways, this is a useful examination of the way in which the writers who the author has chosen had written plays that demonstrate the creative dilemmas and solutions for writers during communism in Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, and connect this with past writers and history. There is some unique research, an analysis of the individual texts and, most interestingly, of the political context for writers in each of the chosen countries. Orlich has opened up a new field of research for scholars who are interested in communist and postcommunist creative frameworks, and there are some useful insights that have not been exposed before. The major lack lies

in the examination of how these writers' works operated in practice, since analyzing a theater text is very different from analyzing the performance and reception of that text. But maybe this is another book . . .

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Living Language in Kazakhstan: The Dialogic Emergence of an Ancestral Worldview. By Eva-Marie Dubuisson. Central Asia in Context. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017. xxiii, 176 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. \$26.95, paper.
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Influence is often considered an affair of the present tense. Histories, ideologies, and persons from one's past matter, of course, but more in relation to how an actor incorporates these artifacts of the past into a guiding narrative for contemporary and future action. Influence thus finds itself marked by a distinction between the living and the dead, where the dead is relegated to a repository of ideas—tools—for present work. In Eva-Marie Dubuisson's *Living Language in Kazakhstan: The Dialogic Emergence of an Ancestral Worldview*, however, we are given a more complicated portrayal of influence, one cognizant of transcendence and how, for many of her interlocutors, deceased ancestors remain active members of Kazakh society.

While transcendence is generally associated with religion, this is not Dubuisson's focus. Instead, and importantly, she shows that transcendence need not be limited to religion for it to be relevant to contemporary society. For her interlocutors, their ancestors are active participants in dialogues about what it means to be Kazakh. This influence "goes beyond the temporal and political constraints of a strictly national ideology" (xxiii) and emerges through dialogic engagement that makes the past an active part of the present. The "active" aspect of this is not merely rooted in thought and memory, but rather in *ongoing* conversations with ancestors over the *longue durée*. It is this nature of conversation-as-dialogue that forms the foundation for understanding the emergence of authority as linked to the performative qualities of language.

Dubuisson outlines this in her introduction, describing an ancestral worldview where the relationship of the living to their ancestors shapes the contemporary cultural context and its imagined future. What emerges is the existence of alternative forms of authority, with ancestors serving as a moral yardstick against which (authoritarian) political behavior is measured (4). The means for expressing this is through the reinforcement of relationships and dialogic performance, exemplified through *aitys*, verbal duels among poets who insert the views of ancestors into public commentaries.

The logic for the role of ancestors as active participants in creating authority emerges out of *bata*, understood as a "cultural wish, supported by God" (33), which gives roots to relationships across generations (Chapter 1). While common among contemporaries, *bata* involves cultural connections shared across time (25–26) that can give comfort in times of distress (34) and warning in face of uncertainty (40). As a person reflects on the role of family and ancestry, he/she encounters the path set forth by the ancestors vis-à-vis *bata*.

Alongside dreams, one way this encounter gets instantiated is at sacred sites where the wishful intentions of ancestors get mediated by caretakers of the sites (56; Chapter 2). Here, when *bata* is offered the ancestral world is connected as both moral guide and community-builder, transcending temporal boundaries while modeling behavioral boundaries. Sacred geography can exist anywhere, with guidance offered