

is confined to brief remarks about “electric dolls” and a grim, full-page photograph of Ruth Snyder strapped into the electric chair. This is an odd reduction given electricity’s hold over the nineteenth century’s grassroots imaginary and its role at the center of what Erik Davis in *TechGnosis* calls the “electromagnetic *unheimlich*.” Relatedly, Case shows no interest in the hugely popular spiritualist movement that emerged in the wake of telegraphy: an enterprise that understood its experiments, *séances*, as a ‘scientific’ contacting of the dead through a Morse-code-like signaling system, thus replacing the telegraph’s electrical mediation by a female medium sensitive to spirit presences—surely a perfect coming together of science, grassroots performance, and gendered spiritism. But if such omissions (and numerous others) are odd, they are so more as missed opportunities and evidence of a certain kind of tunnel vision than as faults in a work that makes no claim to comprehensiveness. In any event, they don’t detract from the provocations and lightning-flash illuminations of Case’s highly original engagement with performance and science.



***Science on Stage: From “Doctor Faustus” to “Copenhagen.”*** By Kirsten Shepherd-Barr. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006; pp. viii + 271. \$32.95 cloth.

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Reviewed by Nicholas J. Dekker, Ohio State University

In the introduction to *Science on Stage: From “Doctor Faustus” to “Copenhagen,”* author Kirsten Shepherd-Barr describes her book as a companion for “teachers, students, and general readers and audience members” of science plays. Though not exhaustive, the book is a thorough overview of key science plays in their historical and critical contexts. In recent years, scholarship on the subject has bloomed, heightened by the popularity of contemporary plays such as Michael Frayn’s *Copenhagen*, David Auburn’s *Proof*, and Tom Stoppard’s *Arcadia*. Shepherd-Barr backtracks to trace the impact of science on drama throughout the past centuries, reaching as far back as Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* and Jonson’s *The Alchemist*. She then attempts to sort through the research in and reviews of these plays, and explore the recent boom in science plays, their appeal to audiences, and how they operate in performance. She organizes the book thematically, grouped by physics, epistemology, the natural sciences, mathematics and thermodynamics, and medicine, and then takes a look at playwrights’ responsibility in retelling history.

Before launching into a series of case studies, Shepherd-Barr contextualizes them with two chapters on the tradition of science plays and their contemporary appeal. These opening chapters explore common theatrical metaphors in science plays, as well as changing perceptions of the scientist. Here Bertolt Brecht’s contributions, particularly his *Life of Galileo*, feature as a turning

point in the “conscious theatricality” of science in performance. *Galileo* illustrates recurring themes such as the scientist’s global responsibility, his interaction with religious thinking, and the playwright’s manipulation of history.

Science offers theatre an abundant source for new plays, Shepherd-Barr argues. Scientists are easily cast as heroes or villains. Their discoveries afford perfect dramatic moments. The assimilation of new knowledge and technology into the public consciousness can be a violent and sudden process. Science plays are often metatheatrical, as their subject matter, at the most basic level, engages questions of epistemology; theatre, with its live interaction, human stories, and capability for special effects naturally bring such questions to the fore.

The five core chapters of *Science on Stage* demonstrate this rich relationship, and Shepherd-Barr explores a variety of scientific topics by focusing on key plays or playwrights within each chapter. Chapter 3 examines physics, and centers on Hallie Flanagan Davis’s  $E = mc^2$ , Ewan MacColl’s *Uranium 235*, and Heinar Kipphardt’s *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, among other plays. Chapter 4 treats Frayn’s *Copenhagen*, the science play par excellence, exclusively. Much has been written about the play already, but Shepherd-Barr navigates the scholarship skillfully, and offers new insights on its importance in the science-play genre.

Chapter 5 investigates evolution and the natural sciences through works like Lawrence and Lee’s *Inherit the Wind* and Timberlake Wertenbaker’s *After Darwin*. Here Shepherd-Barr features one of the newer themes of science plays: genetics and the ethics of experimentation. In plays such as Caryl Churchill’s *A Number* and Shelagh Stephenson’s *An Experiment with an Air-Pump*, genetic experimentation leads to pressing questions of ethics and concern at the scientist’s God-like abilities. The sixth chapter examines mathematics and thermodynamics on the stage, bringing Auburn’s *Proof* and Stoppard’s *Arcadia* into the discussion. Shepherd-Barr’s proficient explication highlights two common threads in science plays: memory and time. *Arcadia*, for instance, portrays two time periods, 1809 and 1989, onstage at once. *Proof* swings backward and forward in time, *Copenhagen* works through several “drafts” of history, and Theatre de Complicite’s *Mnemonic* invites the audience to blindfold themselves and recall past events. Here, Shepherd-Barr argues, theatre excels at representing multiple timelines at once.

The book rounds out with a seventh chapter exploring medicine on the stage, beginning with the doctors represented in Ibsen, Brieux, Shaw, and Kushner, then focusing on Margaret Edison’s *Wit* and Brian Friel’s *Molly Sweeney*. Shepherd-Barr argues, at the chapter’s opening, that plays about medicine and doctors hold special relevance for the average playgoer, since the doctor–patient relationship is often the most direct contact audiences have with science.

Chapter 8, perhaps the most important, examines the future of science and theatre. While plays like *Copenhagen* and *Arcadia* have scored popular successes, they employ mainstream theatrical models. When it comes to science onstage, playwrights and theatre companies have only begun to use theatre’s full capabilities. Theatre de Complicite’s *Mnemonic* and the Barrow–Ronconi

*Infinities* build their pieces out of actor–director collaborations, and offer a look at where science in theatre may go in the future.

In her Conclusion, Shepherd-Barr expresses her hope that the book prompts additional study of science plays. To support this goal, the book then features an annotated Appendix of “Four Centuries of Science Plays.” Organized by subject, this list offers composition dates and brief descriptions of nearly 120 plays. She also references further volumes, articles, and Web sites for information on science plays and performances. The Appendix, she notes, is an ongoing compilation maintained by herself and Harry Lustig; together they authored the article “Science as Theater” in *American Scientist* magazine in 2002.

*Science on Stage* is an accessible and thorough examination of the intersection of science and theatre and serves as a model for the interweaving of the historical and literary analysis.



***Privacy, Playreading, and Women’s Closet Drama, 1550–1700.*** By Marta Straznicky. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004. pp. xi + 183, 7 illus. \$91 cloth.

***Children of the Queen’s Revels: A Jacobean Theatre Repertory.*** By Lucy Munro. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005. pp xii + 270, 6 illus. \$91 cloth.

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Reviewed by Peter Holland, University of Notre Dame

Whatever next? Given the refusal of printed language to prescribe tone without paratextual assistance, it is of course impossible to decide whether the question is an exasperated moment of despair at another example of the world’s stupidity or an enquiry about where on earth we can go from here. Nothing in either *Privacy, Playreading, and Women’s Closet Drama, 1500–1700* or *Children of the Queen’s Revels: A Jacobean Theatre Repertory* necessitates the former response, and yet the materials with which each grapples have a rebarbative quality, a refusal to yield up answers, which must have frustrated the authors at times. For, as scholars of the study of the institutions and practices of early modern drama and theatre attempt to make sense of where their work has reached and where it might go now, they have met recurrent difficulty in engaging with acts of playwrighting.

In Lucy Munro’s context, the problem is how to move beyond an author-dominated analysis, given, not least, that the consumption of performance in the period had little concern for author function (plays were, for instance, never advertised with playwright’s name attached). The way forward she offers is by seeing whether analysis of an institution, here one of the boys’ companies that flourished in London between 1603 and 1613, might provide a different way of manifesting the interactions of playtexts and of individuals in the processes of