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 ***Mishima on Stage: The Black Lizard and Other Plays (review)***

Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

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Mishima on Stage: The Black Lizard and Other Plays. Edited and with an introduction

Mishima Yukio is an endlessly fascinating—and endlessly maddening—writer and personality. Due primarily to his spectacular 1970 suicide protesting the weakened role of the emperor and his vivid, often disturbing prose, many non-Japanese view him as an icon of “the real Japan” lurking beneath the mask of modernity (by which they mean an imaginary, militaristic, premodern Japan imbued with the samurai ethic of *bushidō*). For still others, he is the avatar of a specific type of homosexual eroticism. As Laurence Kominz makes clear, few people outside Japan realize that Mishima also wrote sixty-two plays in genres as diverse as *shingeki* (Western-style psychological drama), melodrama, *kabuki*, *nanjūgen*, and even one *kyōgen*. His language in these theatre pieces veers from stunning classical Japanese to the modern vernacular, and the plays range from comedies and parodies to tragedies and dance-dramas. While none of these plays is a true masterpiece, their translation adds immensely to our understanding of Mishima as an artist. Similarly, important information about Mishima’s place in the history of Japanese theatre is included in Kominz’s general introduction (and in some cases, in the essays preceding the individual plays). Love him or hate him, Mishima the playwright needs to be reckoned with, and this volume is a significant step in that direction. It will be of use to a wide range of readers, from the Japan theatre specialist to potential directors to the beginning student.

Kominz writes that in a 1995 poll, fifty-four Japanese theatre critics and scholars chose Mishima as their nation’s greatest postwar playwright, calling his *Madame de Sade* the best Japanese play of the twentieth century. (Kominz recites the results of this poll on the first page of his introduction, but in the related footnote [59], he modifies the comments by saying that Mishima tied with Inoue Hisashi for best postwar playwright, and that *Madame de Sade* was voted the best postwar [not twentieth-century] Japanese play). Despite his **[End Page**

186] prolific playwrighting, with the exception of *Madame de Sade* and his modern *nō* plays, Mishima's stage works are little known outside of Japan.

Between 1953 and 1968, nine Mishima plays were translated into English (mostly by Donald Keene); however, in the ensuing thirty-four years, not a single piece of Mishima's theatre appeared in English. Kominz suggests that one reason for this lacuna is that his English-language biographers (he cites only one, John Nathan) have ignored or misrepresented his theatrical activities. The embargo on script translations was broken in 2002 with the publication of *My Friend Hitler and Other Plays of Yukio Mishima*, translated by Hiroaki Sato (New York: Columbia University Press). The five plays in Sato's book and the nine in Kominz's new volume combine with the previously translated works to make twenty-three plays that are now available in English. This is a substantial number that helps close that glaring gap and permits non-Japanese readers the opportunity to judge the merits of his playwrighting for themselves. Kominz translated six of the plays, he co-translated one with Donald Keene and one with Jonah Salz, and Mark Oshima translated two others.

Four of these translations offer something never before seen in English: a glimpse at original postwar *kabuki* scripts. This tremendously significant fact is overshadowed by the book's admittedly laudable goal of suggesting the variety and breadth of Mishima's playwrighting. Although it would have been outside the scope of the present book, I cannot help wishing that Kominz had chosen to more fully explore the state of postwar *kabuki* playwrighting, perhaps as an epilogue. Which other playwrights have written postwar *kabuki*? What are their themes? How successful have the plays been? This is an area that cries out for scholarly attention, since the common misconception remains that *kabuki* is...

In the poignant "Traces of a Dream on a Single Sheet," Zeami mourns the early death of his eldest son and heir, Motomasa, to whom he had entrusted his own teachings and the teachings of his father. In despair, contemplating the future of his art, Zeami writes, "I see that I am to accomplish nothing more than to turn it all into dust and smoke, unmastered and profitless" (425). Despite his brilliance, Zeami could not envision a future where *nô* practitioners could read and ponder his concepts or could even have a sense of the person he was. The work Hare began in *Zeami's Style* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986) has reached a zenith in *Zeami: Performance Notes*.

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MISHIMA ON STAGE: THE BLACK LIZARD AND OTHER PLAYS. Edited and with an introduction by Laurence Kominz; foreword by Donald Keene. Michigan Monograph Series in Japanese Studies 59. Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2007. xii + 328 pp. 27 black-and-white photos. Cloth, \$70.00; paper, \$26.00.

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Performance studies: An introduction, pop music watching.

Evaluating stress reduction techniques and Fitzmaurice Voicework as a template for addressing performance anxiety and enhancing focus in student actors, fox poisons the thermodynamic loam, given that in one parsec 3.26 light years.

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