



Reviews

To cite this article: (2004) Reviews, *European Romantic Review*, 15:2, 351-385, DOI: [10.1080/1050958042000215486](https://doi.org/10.1080/1050958042000215486)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1050958042000215486>



Published online: 26 Jan 2007.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 19



View related articles [↗](#)

aesthetic) for the sake of a historical or political imaginary, the New York production points out that this modernity is still very much with us and worthy of our consideration.

Alex Dick is Assistant Professor of English at the University of British Columbia. He completed a dissertation on Romantic drama in 1999. His article 'Romantic Drama and the Performative: A Reassessment,' appeared in a recent issue of *European Romantic Review*. He co-organized the Theater History Symposium in conjunction with NASSR 2002.

MICHAEL EBERLE-SINATRA

On Watching rather than Reading *Count Basil*

The performance of *Count Basil* at this year's NASSR conference was a unique opportunity for those in attendance to share a theatrical experience with the actors in ways that are usually not available to readers and scholars of Romantic drama. In this brief reaction piece, I want to focus on two aspects of this experience: the interaction between the actors and the audience, and the discussion of the modern-day green room after the performance. The former exemplifies what remains most problematic when teaching a play in a classroom in that the shift from printed text to play text has not taken place, not in the way that it would have, or at least could have, from one performance to another, from one kind of audience to another, from one actor familiar with the role and well known to the audience to another who is standing in for a sick actor. The immediate reaction of the audience to the Horizons Theatre's performance of *Count Basil* also encouraged the actors, as they confirmed afterwards in the question time, to modify their performance as it was happening in order to play along to a susceptibility to the comedic dimension of Baillie's play. A participatory audience always absent from classrooms thus influenced to some extent the whole play. The ephemeral dimension of a theatrical performance was thus (re)lived for one night. Its intrinsic absence from most scholarly discussion, either by lack of interest or because of the very impossibility of reconstituting this event, even with the help of reviews and personal anecdotes, was also reasserted when the performance came to an end, as various 'readings' were already starting to take place during the question time. One audience interpreted the same performance in various ways that may have to do with previous knowledge of the text, the actors' pronunciation (though no one was as bad as Kemble in that respect), or simply the length of the play and the difficulty to sustain an engaged viewing for a long period. With food vendors and prostitutes walking around the pit, Romantic audiences were obviously watching with even more strenuous circumstances, but this performance gave everyone a taste of realism in theater attendance.

The exchange that took place after the performance with the actors and the director—what I would qualify as an account of the modern-day green room—was the

second most valuable aspects of this performance in that it allowed the audience to become more intimate with issues involved in transferring a written text into a performed one, in addressing actors' requests or the director's necessary adjustment to the story because of the presence or absence of specific actors for the parts available (in that case the need to use the same actors for several parts in order to restrict their number for financial reasons, reasons of course also present in Romantic-era staging decision), and in the creative process that occurs during rehearsals and between the first public performance in Washington and the one we witnessed. The director and actors candidly shared their experience and the process at play in the weeks leading to that first performance, a process that still resembles what many actors and journalists describe in the surviving account of green room meetings under the auspice of Kemble or others. For those not directly implicated in Romantic drama, that interactive dimension of the composition, revision, and alteration process is bound to have been revealing of one of the unique characteristics of this literary genre. It also underscores the importance of studying everything that is directly related to a production—namely the author, the actors and director involved in the production—but also of remaining aware of other factors apparently peripheral and yet crucial to any discussion of a play like *Count Basil*. These include financial constraints, the need to accommodate the musicians and stage designer, and even the success of other plays performed in other theaters that week to will, draw or detract audiences from attending a play (in our case it was the temptation of Broadway versus an attempt at a historically-accurate performance of a Romantic play).

Michael Eberle-Sinatra teaches at the Université de Montreal and is the founding general editor, with Thomas C. Crochunis, of *The British Women Playwrights around 1800* project (<http://www-sul.stanford.edu/mirrors/romnet/wp1800/index.html>). He has published several articles on Romantic drama, including Leigh Hunt's early theatrical criticism. He is currently preparing a hypertext edition of Joanna Baillie's *De Monfort* for the *BWP1800* project (available in early 2004). He is also the founding editor of *Romanticism on the Net* (<http://www.ron.umontreal.ca/>).

MICHAEL GAMER

Seeing Horizons Theatre's production of *Count Basil* has made me like Baillie's first published tragedy considerably more than I had previously. I'll confess to having thought *Count Basil* one of Baillie's barest and most predictable tragedies, its chief interest lying in its public and martial scenes—not only the opening procession (I.i), but also the situations between men including, of course, the key scene (IV.ii) in which Basil wins back his mutinous troops. In Baillie's text, this division between public and private is as marked as it is gendered, and the resulting conflicts between contending spheres drives Anne Mellor's reading of the play, not to mention hers and Richard Matlak's decision to include it in *British Literature 1780–1830*. Given how many of these public scenes were cut from Horizons production of the play, I'm somewhat surprised by how much I enjoyed their performance; but director Leslie Jacobson