

ing sense of gender relations and roles themselves. In doing so, the authors do not wish to place stress upon their own analytical abilities as academics, but seek to describe the efforts of ordinary people (inside and outside academia) to make their lives “culturally intelligible” (3). Their study has identified a number of contradictions and ambiguities deriving from the complexity of the field and the messiness of the research process where, interestingly enough, all the collected data refer to college-educated and middle class participants. The study does not promise to solve existing theoretical debates concerning either gender studies or popular culture. What it seeks to articulate is a complex position in between some of the dominant traditions within the sociology of culture and cultural studies. I have no hesitation in recommending it as an addition to the resource material of English Departments or Sociology Departments, or as part of one’s own personal collection of academic debates and research questions, to which it would definitely mean a distinctive contribution.

Knapp, Annelie, Erwin Otto, Gerd Stratmann, Merle Tönnies, eds. *British Drama of the 1990s*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2002. 201. pp.

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This collection of essays was commissioned, according to the Introduction, by the editors of the series *anglistik & englischunterricht* (13), which suggests to the reader that the research findings in English Studies provided by the individual volumes are regarded as teaching aids at the same time. It is certainly a healthy way of combining and thus widening academic functions and practical purposes. The outcome, in the present case, is a volume abundant in information yet being considerably more than just a storehouse of names, titles and useful statistical data about the appearance of new authors and the welcome rise in the number of theatre-goers. A balance between ambitions is successfully achieved by including essays which offer a survey of trends and/or subcategories in the field under scrutiny to introduce other writings concerned with smaller parts of the whole.

Predictably, the papers together seek answers to the question of how much continuity 1990s British drama has with the traditions prevalent in the previous decades, and how much novelty it displays in comparison with its predecessors. In the first article Klaus Peter Müller ventures to redefine, admitting the various difficulties the task involves, what “political drama” means in the new decade. Following his argument it seems that there is an important shift here: the state-of-nation play, which evolved in the 1980s, has been replaced by works addressing the problems of particular sections of society. Ayub Khan-Din’s *East is East* (1997, film version 1999) is briefly discussed in the same paper as an example for the treatment of ethnic issues in their politically relevant complexity. The contemporary situation of the “history play,” a British inven-

tion in its classical form, is looked at next by Mark Berninger. He also recommends redefinition of the term itself in the face of new developments, stressing that revisionist, metahistorical and posthistorical plays are types of the sub-genre as much as works which draw on the past in a documentary or realistic way (40). David Edgar's *Pentecost* (1995) is examined in some detail to show that a narrow approach to the history play no longer holds. The symbolic representation of the working of power in successive periods, the argument runs, is relevant to the genre in that "the charged, multi-layered space of the church [...] illustrates the use and abuse of history as well as the influence history has on the present" in *Pentecost* (51).

"An Embarrassment of Riches: Women Dramatists in 1990's Britain" by Mary Luckhurst finds that there is cause for joy over a greater proportion of the new plays being woman-authored than earlier. Several of her examples are from the fringe, including the Scottish Liz Lochhead's version of *Medea* (2000) which offered "a modernised, wise-cracking text" in Scots (71), and the Belfast-born Marie Jones' work, whose *Stones in His Pocket* (1999) has become a world-wide success. Notably, it is not the woman-centeredness of the plays but their general theatrical appeal that the critic emphasizes. Flanking this, the article about Black women playwrights, written by Heiko Stahl, underscores how vividly they contribute to the introduction of postcolonial and immigrant issues, like the sense of displacement, to the British stage. Among women authors the short-lived talent, Sarah Kane's work has received separate treatment. Graham Saunders in "The Apocalyptic Theatre of Sarah Kane" emphasizes that theatricality, "the transgression of dramatic boundaries" (133) occupies a vital importance in the handful of plays she left behind, which is a merit deserving far more attention in an era which is so much influenced by the techniques of film and TV. Suggesting kinship with classical and Elizabethan tragedy, the extreme states and situations the plays bring to stage make, nonetheless, references to their own time. Kane's first play, *Blasted* (1995), already hit audiences in the head by presenting brutality in a way that it could be associated with the atrocities of the contemporary war in Yugoslavia.

More than with the world of female writers, the daring art of Kane is unmistakably connected with the phenomenon elaborated on by Aleks Sierz under the title "In-Yer-Face Theatre. Mark Ravenhill and 1990s Drama." The critic offers a definition which expounds the novelty aspects in a both complex and well contextualized way, pointing out that it is "experiential theatre," where the "commitment to extremes" (110) and the breaking of taboos serve the function of shaking audiences out of their complacency and elicit response. Ravenhill's notorious *Shopping and Fucking* (1998) is investigated at some length as an example for In-Yer-Face tactics, concluding that it deliberately lacks naturalism and its main strength lies in "its density of metaphor" and "vivid stage pictures" to show "how sex and intimacy can be subsumed by shopping and alienation" (112). With Osborne among its possible ancestors it is a kind of political theatre, no doubt, which, along with many other shocking themes exposes the crisis of masculinity and sexuality in general as well as the emergence of what is

called “new laddism” (114). In another article Patrick Marber’s *Closer* (1997) impresses Michael Raab as a play interrogating issues of post-feminist masculinity and sexuality. The author of this piece encountered the playwright in the capacity of a dramaturg, which adds a particular aspect to his writing, largely missing from the rest of the volume, since he reports about the various problems of staging new British plays in Germany.

One or two writers, who established themselves in the British theatre long before the 90s, also feature in separate chapters. Not surprisingly, they include Tom Stoppard and Harold Pinter, while the third choice is Howard Barker, whose work has enjoyed far less general acclaim although he does attract some very devoted fans. Heiner Zimmermann rescues especially his idiosyncratic use of history from oblivion in the last essay of the book. Stoppard’s *Hapgood* (1988) and *Arcadia* (1993) as well as Michael Frayn’s *Copenhagen* (1998) are in the centre of Christopher Innes’ article about science on stage, demonstrating that C. P. Snow’s one-time belief in the divide between “two cultures” is contradicted by the theatre of our time. *The Invention of Love*, Stoppard’s 1997 success is analyzed by Raimund Borgmeier, who points out how craftedly the writer brings together “different thematic and plot strands” (161) while repeating his homage to Oscar Wilde in a drama basically about a lesser talent, A. E. Housman. In the case of Pinter, the political element of his recent plays (for instance in the 1996 *Ashes to Ashes*) makes them lose in complexity, according to Bernhard Reitz, at least when compared with the mystery and ambiguity characterizing the earlier work (178).

All in all, the reader of the volume is definitely presented with a huge spectrum of information, survey, commentary, analysis as well as fruitful dialogue among the individual papers themselves. What is more, there are occasional side-glances in the direction of other nations’ drama to widen the perspective and raise issues for comparison. Since most of the critics are from Germany, the mention of German drama is quite natural, but some American playwrights also occur as points of reference. Works from Ireland are not the subject of the volume; there is no reason why they would be subsumed under the heading of British drama, as Mark Berninger rightly claims (59). Yet he is not the only critic to refer to some masterpieces from Ireland, reminding the reader of their significance in relation to what is new on the British stage. Which may well be worth looking at more closely in another study.

Duffin, Ross. *W. Shakespeare’s Songbook*. New York and London: Norton, 2004. 528 pp + accompanying I Audio CD.

Andrew C. Rouse

If ever you thought you could properly evaluate a Shakespeare drama without using your ears, this is the time to finally surrender your stance and bow to the supreme