

The question of 'histories' over 'history' is paid due attention as the author both engages with existing scholarship and takes the analysis to the next level. We cannot quite argue that the case studies are obscure, in fact often quite the opposite, but Gluhovic's analytical methodology shows as much an understanding of recent developments in the field as of the historical treatment. Judith Butler and Sigmund Freud rightly emerge as key references and the former, especially, sets the tone for the enquiry, though it would be reductive to say that Gluhovic's theoretical framework is anything but thoughtfully nuanced throughout. The book, suitably pitched at the advanced postgraduate level, will appeal to scholars working in memory studies and the stage, while its consideration of lived-through, embodied, and represented trauma in the context of sociopolitical crises and fluid identities is incisive and urgent, making this an important critical source in the broader field.

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Claire Warden

British Avant-Garde Theatre

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 232 p. £50.00.

ISBN: 978-0-230-28578-1.

Claire Warden's book makes a useful intervention into both British theatre histories and those of the (predominantly European) avant garde. The decision to use the framework of the avant garde – traditionally associated loosely with experimentation, disregard of traditional form, and counter-culture in nature – as opposed to 'modernist', at times seems at odds with some of the practice the volume investigates. It is however, a decision inspired by the desire to place together aspects of British theatre practice typically separated out by aesthetic categories or by politics.

The book includes chapters that focus on the work of the Group Theatre, the Workers' Theatre Movement, and on Ewan MacColl and early Joan Littlewood. There is also a valuable underlying agenda to explore the significant cross-overs and influences between the European avant-garde as we might know it – the German Expressionists or the Russian Blue Blouses, for example – and the more experimental work that was going on in Britain between the end of the nineteenth century and the mid-1900s. Warden successfully identifies the operation of cross-fertilization across European forms and theories of the social function of theatre as well as those focusing on aesthetics.

The work on MacColl is particularly useful in its breadth and depth. Perhaps more emphasis on the complex dynamics of both British history during the early twentieth century and the shifts

in the focus of the political left would have been useful in locating the 'social' in an understanding of the changing forms and practices among the more avant-garde theatre and performance makers of the period. Similarly the referral to the work of the commercial sector as 'escapist' somewhat impoverishes arguments around the popular and populism. But while Palgrave's pricing policy will make *British Avant-Garde Theatre* inaccessible to most, it is both good and a must-read. There are far too few books on this period of British theatre which genuinely attempt to reform our understandings of the significance of theatre cultures and theatre as a cultural product. This volume ought to be made available in paperback so that people can actually use it.

MAGGIE B. GALE

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David Pattie, ed.

Modern British Playwriting: the 1950s

London: Methuen, 2012. 281 p. £16.99.

ISBN: 978-1-408-12927-2.

Whatever choices one makes of playwrights to represent a decade, somebody will always find grounds for saying 'Well, why choose *those?*' In this volume on the 1950s, the case for both Rattigan and Wesker is made convincingly, that for Osborne over-enthusiastically, and that for Eliot with a surprising air of detachment. The book overall is both readable and worthwhile, and though its primary target audience is probably undergraduate, it contains some thought-provoking insights for an academic reader.

David Pattie's brief account of the achievements and shortcomings of successive Labour and Conservative administrations is useful, and would serve a student reader particularly well as a source of contextual material. The following section on culture and society is perhaps less successful, though Pattie provides a strong sense of the triumph of American influences in the shape of consumerism and jazz.

The overview chapter on British theatre of the period sets up two compelling binaries, one between playwrights – headed by Beckett and Brecht – and the other between theatres – headed by the Royal Court and Theatre Royal, Stratford East. The volume then takes a structural path that I think is a mistake – in common with some of the other volumes in the series – since the editor sometimes anticipates his contributors on specific playwrights. This risks duplication and confusion – exacerbated by the date-system used in the sub-heads: 'Arnold Wesker (1932–58)' for example is surely a trap for the unwary.

Turning to the essays on individual playwrights, in Sarah Bay-Cheng's piece on Eliot's plays the case for regarding Eliot as a proto-