

two politically charged periods in the writer's life is fascinating. In the earlier work Bond is certainly mistrustful of society but also hopeful for the future (see the 'optimistic' conclusions to *Saved* and *Lear*). In the later period, however, his earlier positivity dissipated and was replaced by a certain inevitability that the democratic society is doomed to fail.

Billingham's passion for Bond's work is clear. The analysis of the plays is thoughtful and the author gives a good sense of context throughout. Interviews with practitioners who have worked with Bond (along with the occasional word from the man himself) also give great insights into the working practices of this least conventional playwright. In fact, the book as a whole helps to highlight just how innovative Bond has been during the latter half of the past century and how he continues to defy convention in the early years of the new.

It would be easy after fifty years of activity to categorize this study as a retrospective of Bond's work. This would be incorrect as, in the author's words, 'Bond's output as a dramatist demonstrates an ongoing evolution of ideological discourse and post-structural innovation.' Bond as a playwright has never stood still, never becoming 'comfortable' in any one temporal, thematic, or structural 'place', and is still 'evolving' his craft. In essence, this study is a timely reminder that Bond's early work was prescient and his later work continues to be relevant in the present day,

WILL NELSON

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Penny Farfan and Lesley Ferris, ed.

**Contemporary Women Playwrights:
into the Twenty-First Century**

Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 348 p.

£19.99.

ISBN: 978-1-137-27078-8.

Focusing on women playwrights from 1990 onwards, this text offers a wide-ranging look at a number of noted and lesser-known writers. Despite the editors' apologies as to the 'incomplete' nature of the book, it does offer more of an international perspective than previous texts covering women playwrights, and includes chapters on Egyptian, South African, Latin American, and Oceanic writers. The text is divided into three sections ('Histories', 'Conflicts', and 'Genres'); however, these delineations seem rather arbitrary since the majority of chapters, as one would expect in such a broad topic, overlap and could as easily be placed in one section as another.

Bookended by two of the leading scholars in feminist theatre, Elaine Aston and Elin Diamond, the book is very much rooted in Aston's assertion that much of women's contemporary writing is

'feeling the loss of feminism', in that while few plays are specifically about feminism, the subject matter and form of presentation reflect the dissatisfaction that many women have with the so-called post-feminist era.

Aston's excellent chapter, and the book in general, were published too early to provide effective commentary on the rapid rise of third-generation feminism. Theatre has, however, also been slow to respond to the rise of a younger generation of feminists, so the text accurately reflects the present concerns of women playwrights. Diamond's nostalgic chapter is a wonderful tribute to three artists who led the way for feminist theatre-makers – Deb Margolin, Robbie McCauley, and Peggy Shaw – and reminds us of the physical potency that is commonplace in work by women.

Other highlights include Nehad Selaiha and Sarah Enany's examination of Egyptian women attempting to work in changing political climates; Soyica Diggs Colbert's look at the African American cultural context of Katori Hall's *The Mountaintop*; and Diana Looser's documentation of indigenous women playwrights in Oceania, many of whom have received little critical attention. There is a noticeable absence throughout the book of commentary on the process the women undertake in creating their work; more information on methodology would be useful, especially given the often difficult circumstances women face in getting work produced.

Of obvious interest to feminist scholars, this text should also be read by those generally interested in international work; it offers a number of possibilities of plays to stage for theatre-makers wishing to look beyond the standard fare.

KAREN MORASH

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Anthony Roche

Synge and the Making of Modern Irish Drama

Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2013. 288 p. £37.22.

ISBN: 978-1-904505-64-8.

This fine collection of stimulating essays in homage to John Millington Synge includes three specially written for this volume. Roche evaluates both Synge's status as a founding figure of modern Irish drama and an enduring dramaturgical resource for recent and, he speculates, forthcoming work. A former director of the annual Synge Summer School, and an intellectually curious scholar of contemporary Irish theatre, Roche is well suited to his subject and this task.

The study is presented in consecutive sections, structured around two critical purposes: to show 'how theatrically alive and fertile *The Playboy of the Western World* remains', and to argue that Synge's dramas are 'seminal . . . to the century of Irish drama which followed' his death in 1909.