



BIROn - Birkbeck Institutional Research Online

Eve, Martin Paul (2016) On Siân Adiseshiah and Louise LePage's Twenty-First-Century Drama (2016). In: What Happens Now? 21st-Century Writing in English, 27th-30th June 2016, University of Lincoln. (Unpublished)

Downloaded from: <http://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/15633/>

Usage Guidelines:

Please refer to usage guidelines at <http://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/policies.html>
contact lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk.

or alternatively

- Siân Adiseshiah and Louise LePage's
- *Twenty-First-Century Drama*
- Palgrave Macmillan

Three core areas that I will speak about with respect to this volume:

- The range of the text itself and the diversity of the contributions of which it is composed
 - The editorial work in the book with respect to binding together its worldwind of themes
 - Followed by some concluding remarks on the text's politics
- The first core narrative line in the book is about passing beyond postmodernism. What space is there for realism, for instance, asks Elaine Aston, examining Fiona Evans' *Scarborough* (2008), Lucy Kirkwood's *NSFW* (2012) and Anupama Chandrasekhar's *Free Outgoing* (2007). Meanwhile, Chris Megson asks us what it means in dramaturgical terms to think about belief in the clearly unbelievable space of theatre, in an age so otherwise interested in disenchantment, examining *Bullet Catch* (2009) by Rob Drummond, *Enron* (2009) by Lucy Prebble and *13* (2011) by Mike Bartlett. We also have provocative takes on Shakespeare in this section from Stephen Bottoms, who instead turns to so-called emancipated reinterpretations of these canonical works in order to go beyond a pedagogy of appreciation, so embedded in our secondary school systems, examining Tim Crouch's, *I, Cinna (the Poet)* (2012) and Toneelgroep Amsterdam's *Roman Tragedies*. Finally, for the post-postmodern, Paola Botham turns to examine the ways in which twenty-first century drama has explored history, historiography and meta-historiography, with particular emphasis on Howard Brenton's *Anne Boleyn* (2010), David Greig's *Dunsinane* (2010) and James Graham's *The House*.
 - The second section of the text is concerned with the return of class narratives in contemporary drama, centred around the political ideology of austerity. My colleague at Birkbeck, Louise Owen, here first examines the ways in which a range of theatrical interventions have often staged the representation of the financial crisis in explicitly gendered ways, working on David Eldridge's *Market Boy* (2006), Dennis Kelly's *Love and Money* (2006), Lucy Prebble's *Enron* (2009) and David Hare's *The Power of Yes* (2009). Mark O'Thomas, likewise, turns to the crash, but frames this through its ongoing legacy and translation into austerity politics, particularly through movements such as *Theatre Uncut*. Finally for this section, Siân herself unearths the ways in which plays such as Jez Butterworth's *Jerusalem* (2009), Simon Stephens's *Port* (2002) and Gillian Slovo's *The Riots* (2011) engage in what she calls a "twenty-first-century form of class-making".
 - In its penultimate section, the work turns to a series of pieces that consider the ideas of borders, race, and nation, to which I will return when I speak of the text's politics. Here, once more, Butterworth's *Jerusalem* comes to the fore, when Nadine Holdsworth considers the ideas of traveller and gypsy identity politics in the play. Beyond this, Trish Reid next works on ideas of Scottishness and particularly the significance of the National Theatre of Scotland's work in site-specific performances, such as *Home*. And finally here, Emma Cox turn to one of the most pressing political and humanitarian issues of our time, in the figure of the refugee that she sees in Ros Horin's 2004 *Through the Wire* and *Journey of Asylum – Waiting*, which was devised by Catherine Simmonds and members of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre.
 - But of course, no text on 21st century drama would be complete without a turn to formal

experiment and the makings of new worlds within dramatic frameworks. For instance, here Mary Luckhurst tells us of the role of genetics and cloning in Kylie Trounson's *The Waiting Room* (Melbourne, 2015), and Caryl Churchill's *Far Away* (2000) and *A Number* (2004). From this dystopian perspective, Marie Kelly then takes us to investigate the "other-worldly naturalism", as the editors put it, of Katie Mitchell, the director who describes her theatrical canvas as "like painting with people". At almost the close of the volume, Louise brings her analytic skill to bear on Oriza Hirata's *Three Sisters: Android Version*, examining the role that robots play in this work, before finally the text is closed by Una Chaudhuri's chapter on Wallace Shawn's *Grasses of a Thousand Colors* (2009) and Caryl Churchill's *Far Away* (2000) and specifically the difficulties of representing events on a vast scale, on so small, yet comprehensible, a stage.

- A dizzying range of plays, themes, and analyses, then. But let me say two more brief things about this book. This is not a work that is disunited or messy. The pieces, so different in their contexts, approaches, and subject matter, have been brought into a cohesive and persuasive narrative of the ways in which British theatre has been a vibrant site for the exploration of diverse cultural and aesthetic contexts. This is down to the work of the editors in selecting and editing the collection.
- Which brings me to my final point before I will let you get on with your evenings. For I feel this book should be celebrated and read for its politics. It is not a book that makes facile and easy claims about the political and social benefits of artworks, of literature, or of drama. It is not a book that is content to simply rehash the age-old adages that we recycle in the academy, that by somehow wishing it to be so, the politics that we often draw out from works of literature might obtain purchase in the world. It is instead a work where a political thrust runs through almost every line. The title, for instance, "Twenty-First-Century Drama", omits the word British as a nationalistic concept that is not helpful for thinking about the range of contexts within which drama, which so happens to be British, has emerged. And, in a world in which we know what the word Brexit might happen to mean, such politics in our fields are a welcome and necessary intervention.
-
- And so I commend to you this book and do so in praise of its authors, but above all its editors, whose commitment, passion, and knowledge makes this a work that would be well worth your time in an age when so much other politics boil down to pure... performance.