Amazon All Stars: Thirteen Lesbian Plays with Essays and Commentary  by Rosemary Keefe Curb
Review by: Sarah Bay-Cheng
Published by: The Johns Hopkins University Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/25068546
Accessed: 24/04/2012 11:10

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the scripts (and perhaps videos). Yet it is in this drawback that the book’s scholarly strength lies. Cousin takes a character from a familiar canon, such as Nora, and uses her as a reference point to introduce the reader to a wealth of literature associated with the feminist movement in England. Cousin’s ability to delve deeply into a character’s mind and motives opens the canon of contemporary British dramatic literature to students and scholars alike.

What emerges from this book is a distinctive approach to play analysis. The literary world is fraught with male voices analyzing both male and female characters. Cousin presents a new, refreshing, and creative voice, to which scholars should listen with a discerning ear.

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It is tempting to wish this anthology did not need to exist, that these plays would be readily available in other, less specialized collections of plays. Sadly, this is not the case. Most of these plays have been published for the first time in this collection, and although nearly all have been produced, few have appeared in so-called mainstream theatres or outside their original venues. Rosemary Keefe Curb has taken on the admirable task of collecting and presenting these relatively unknown works, contextualizing each within the playwright’s life as well as within issues of lesbian community and trends in lesbian feminist discourse.

Since Kate McDermott’s 1985 collection, several anthologies of lesbian plays and playwrights have been compiled (most of which Curb lists in her bibliography). Until now, however, few editors have combined these plays with significant criticism. The thirteen plays included (alphabetically by playwright) in Amazon All Stars all have accompanying introductions that provide useful information about the playwright, the history of the play, and the theoretical discourse within which the play might be located. For instance, in her introduction to Patricia Montley’s Sisters, Madonna Miner argues against Jill Dolan’s conclusions on the necessity of non-realistic forms in lesbian representation, “realism is inherently heterosexist and conservative” (321), by claiming that the realistic form “functions first as a reminder of how powerful heterosexist imperatives can be, and second, as critique of the reductive approach (‘either/or,’ ‘all or nothing’)” that the protagonist [in Sisters] faces and ultimately succumbs to” (322).

Curb herself acknowledges the relevance of a variety of dramatic forms, including not only the well-made Sisters, but also solo work such as Canyon Sam’s The Dissident and works that challenge the conventions of dramatic realism such as Gloria Joyce Dickler’s The Postcard. Maria Irene Fornes’s Springtime and Paula Vogel’s witty deconstruction of Shakespeare’s Desdemona offer other perspectives on lesbian “avant-garde.” The inclusion of the camp musical from which the anthology takes its title, Amazon All-Stars by Carolyn Gage and Sue Carney, widens this spectrum of styles even further.

This work includes not only a range of forms, but also many different perspectives. Works by African-American, Hispanic, Asian, and Jewish writers are included; the anthology reflects varying religious viewpoints, class differences, and a multitude of lifestyles without seeming forced. Curb manages to be inclusive without sacrificing quality, unlike earlier feminist collections of plays, poetry, or prose works in which concerns about the inclusion of marginalized writers and artists sometimes superseded evaluative criticism.

Furthermore, Curb has chosen plays that resist being recognized only as lesbian plays. While a work like Amazon All-Stars, a lesbian camp musical, is obviously intended for a specialized audience, in many of the plays lesbianism is not the only or most important dramatic issue. Rather, in many of the plays it is used simply as a character trait, and receives no more or less attention than any other issue. Curb challenges the very notion of what defines a “lesbian” play, by including works written by “out” lesbian playwrights that do not deal explicitly with lesbianism. Consequently, she creates a work that is broad in not only its scope of theatrical styles, but also its appeal to a diverse body of readers.

What this collection highlights most is the possibility for the inclusion of many marginalized identities through the representation of lesbians: how exploring issues of lesbian expression seems to free these plays from traditional restrictions of content and form. With regard to Miner’s defense of realism, for instance, it seems less important whether or not a lesbian aesthetic is inherently realistic, than how the boundary-crossings required for the inclusion of lesbians are used to explore a range of
Aitken suggests that Style: Acting in High Comedy is not intended as a scholarly, critical analysis of comedy but rather for the actor who must find the way to make the words on the page spring to life in performance. It is in this realm that her book provides the most insight. Like other acting texts on "styles of acting," Aitken's book provides the standard steps an actor should take to prepare a role for high comedy (research the period by reading both published and unpublished materials, examine the art work, listen to the music of the period, etc.) Through this process, Aitken suggests the actor must devise the means by which his or her character can live truthfully in the world of the play.

Aitken divides her book into several chapters and uses selected scenes from high comedy, such as The Way of the World, The School for Scandal, Much Ado About Nothing, The Importance of Being Earnest, Private Lives, The Rivals, and The Double Dealer, to illustrate her points through line-by-line paraphrasing, analyses, and commentaries. She begins with the reminder that an actor must understand the period in which the play is written and the "rules" for success within its society. Her first chapter, "Delivery: Naturalism and Energy" plainly tells actors that in order to make the witty and heightened language of high comedy more natural to the actor and accessible to the audience, the actor must know his or her lines inside and out; only then will the actor's words take flight. Aitken explains that today's actors often want to develop the psychological make-up of characters without concern for the exact words they are speaking. With high comedy such an approach is fatal because the character is the language and vice versa.

Aitken's line-by-line commentary on Congreve's The Way of the World is a fine example of how a close examination of language can yield information as to character development. Aitken also provides helpful explanations of some of the archaic references or words whose meanings have changed over time. But while such explications of The Way Of The World show off her ability to mine a scene of high comedy for all its wonderful innuendo, her discussion of the need for energy in line delivery in The School for Scandal lacks the keen eye and fresh ideas she provides in her other commentaries. However, her analysis of repartee with respect to Beatrice and Benedick in Much Ado About Nothing brings things back on track, with practical advice on how to "pass the baton" or "serve it up" for the other actor(s) when involved in a feisty round of repartee. Likewise her discussion of irony and its subtleties in Gwendolen's and Cecily's tea scene in The Importance of Being Earnest is superb because of