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Amazon All Stars: Thirteen Lesbian Plays with Essays and Commentary by Rosemary Keefe Curb

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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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**AMAZON ALL STARS: THIRTEEN LESBIAN PLAYS WITH ESSAYS AND COMMENTARY.** Edited by Rosemary Keefe Curb. New York: Applause Books, 1996; pp. vii + 482. \$18.95 paper.

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*, Madonne 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

theatrical possibilities. Ultimately, the book illustrates the potential for previously marginalized work to recreate as normative a variety of unconventional experiences. Joan Schenker's *The Lodger* illustrates not only the lesbian relationship between two women, but also highlights the fantasies and insecurities of an all-female society. Joan Lipkin's *Small Domestic Acts* also includes a diversity of opinions and emotions; through the two relationships—one straight, one lesbian—depicted, Lipkin explores a variety of reactions to ending and beginning relationships.

Naturally, this book is of most use to scholars in the field and other theatre artists searching for lesbian material, as well as to lesbian audiences. But Curb's anthology does not limit itself to a homosexual readership. Through challenging of the limits of theatre and theatrical representation, these plays have a far more universal appeal. Most valuable is the book's insistence on the normalcy of this radical subject-position, perhaps best stated in Nancy Dean's comment in her introduction to Jane Chambers's work, that "homosexuality is merely one of the ways to be human" (4).

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**STYLE: ACTING IN HIGH COMEDY.** By Maria Aitken. New York: Applause, 1996; pp. 142. \$12.95 paper.

**ACTING WITH SHAKESPEARE: THREE COMEDIES.** By Janet Suzman. New York: Applause, 1996; pp. 153. \$12.95 paper.

*Style: Acting in High Comedy* by Maria Aitken and *Acting With Shakespeare: Three Comedies* by Janet Suzman provide meaty advice and anecdotal wisdom about acting comedy, a craft that often, as these two authors freely admit in their books, defies clear explanation. Written by veterans of the British stage, these two new additions to Applause's Acting Series do not provide sufficient instruction in and of themselves for the newcomer to this more specialized area of acting. However, these books do provide insightful commentary and helpful explanations of some of the more well-known scenes from comedies of times past, particularly with respect to the historical context of the plays and their use of language. For these reasons, they are good additions to an acting teacher's or an advanced actor's library.

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