

concern, on the whole, is the isolation of this perspective and its expression through the formal organization of Arden's early work – the plays written for the professional theatre – ending with a detailed analysis of *The Island of the Mighty*.

The author sets a context for his analysis by establishing a simple dichotomy between, 'Dominant Bourgeois Tradition' and 'Radical Alternative Tradition' – that is, between 'naturalism' and those Marxist-Brechtian structures of which Brecht is the signifying example. This certainly functions to give a simple opposition between the ideologies of bourgeois naturalism and the Brecht/Arden structure, while also allowing the relationship between formal organization of a work and ideological assumptions to be exposed. However, such a simplification does have its drawbacks.

That said, Malick proceeds with a clear and engaging argument, developing the major issues he isolates in Arden's work: the enlistment of popular theatre forms in the development of a plebeian perspective, the celebration and the reinstatement of community, the retelling of history and legend in the creation and validation of that perspective, and Arden's skill in the manipulation of theatrical languages. He establishes Arden first as a political playwright, and secondly as a playwright whose works provide a rich and valuable source for both study and performance.

Unfortunately, the book ends before it has a chance to establish or open up a continuing discussion – before, that is, it extends its terms, issues, and arguments so they may be picked up by others and developed. The book comes to an abrupt halt with Malick's energetic analysis of *The Island of the Mighty*. A concluding chapter would bring together the multitude of issues, both regarding Arden's work and critical discussion of theatre, and their implications. This would open, if not demand, further discussion, or at the very least direct the argument towards and encourage examination of his later work. The book ends; the discussion is closed.

Malick's book does, however, examine Arden's early work in a comprehensive analytic context which develops a consciousness of the relationship between form and content, and creates practical insight into the use of theatrical devices as active participants in the meaning-making process. As Malick himself makes clear, John Arden's writing career has continued and has yet to be studied or, for the most part, seen. By bringing to the foreground the works of probably the most accomplished playwright of the modern British theatre, this volume is most welcome. One hopes that its very existence might earn more widespread attention for this exceptional, largely unappreciated playwright.

ELAINE TURNER

Lois Gordon

The World of Samuel Beckett, 1906-1946

New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996. 250 p. ISBN 0-300-06409-8.

Gordon's book is written in the conviction that Beckett's work has its roots in the historical period in which he developed as a man and a writer. There is thus little here about the work itself, even though the early fiction was written during this period. Rather, the book, which is organized mainly in a chronological sequence, seeks to place Beckett's life in its historical context, both artistic and political.

There are chapters on Ireland, Paris in 1928, Joyce, Jack B. Yeats, London in the 1930s, Germany, France, the Resistance and Beckett's war years in Roussillon, and finally his work for the Irish Red Cross in Saint-Lô at the war's end. The book thus ends as Beckett is about to embark on the 'siege in a room' from which he emerged as the author of the great prose trilogy, *Waiting for Godot*, and *Endgame*.

However, while Gordon is concerned to establish the way in which this work is, at least in part, a response to the formative experiences of these years, much of her argument concerning the books and newspaper articles that Beckett may have read or the films, plays, and pictures that he could have seen remains speculative: 'perhaps', 'may', 'might have', 'possibly', and 'probably' are recurring words among the long, undigested lists of names and titles.

While she is laudably intent on refuting the image of the sick and solipsistic recluse presented by Deirdre Bair in her 1978 biography, the author ultimately tells us a great deal about Europe between the wars in what amounts to a kaleidoscope of miscellaneous information – but little about Beckett himself, and nothing about his theatre. For that we – and the general reader at whom this book is presumably aimed – will have to await James Knowlson's imminent authorized biography.

MICHAEL ROBINSON

Katherine E. Kelly, ed.

Modern Drama by Women, 1880s-1930s: an International Anthology

London; New York: Routledge, 1996. 319p. £14.99. ISBN 0-415-12494-8.

This anthology seeks to challenge the male-dominated and Eurocentric perspective on the making of 'modern drama'. The volume contains twelve plays by women from diverse countries, including Argentina, Russia, the Americas, and Sweden. Certain of the plays appear for the first time in English-language translations. However,

these vary in quality, with some in need of further work to make them playable.

The dramas are organized into two sections: 'Realisms' and 'Departures'. The first joins the current backlash against feminist theory's challenge to main(male)stream stagings of realism, by presenting the plays as 'further evidence of the feminist uses to which realist conventions were put'. The second section is the more exciting, demonstrating the stylistic diversity of women's theatre in the period. The entry for Japan, Hasegawa Shigure's *Wavering Traces*, for example, shows the anthology working at its best: publishing dramatic material new to the feminist 'canon' and offering valuable contextualizing detail on Japanese culture, staging, and performance.

The volume will have a readership in feminist theatre studies and women's studies. Students, particularly research students in the field of modern drama, will find the individual introductions to the playwrights and the select bibliographical details useful. How far the collection will succeed in 'explod[ing]' the teaching of 'the traditional canon' remains to be seen.

ELAINE ASTON

Tony Howard and John Stokes, eds.

Acts of War: the Representation of Military Conflict on the British Stage and Television since 1945

Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996.
ISBN 1-859-28247-4.

The full title of this collection gives a fair idea of the area covered, though not of the extremely diverse nature of the contents. Most of the essays derive from papers delivered at the 'Acts of War' Conference held at the University of Warwick in 1994 and, put together, they form a somewhat unwieldy package. For this reason, the editorial 'Introduction' is of particular value, offering not only a guided tour through the essays (in an account that makes links that are not always that apparent as you move from one essay to another), but a superb history of the way in which the subject has been treated on stage and on television over the past forty years, considering not only how 'the legacy of the Second World War still overshadows our present, and our future, but how subsequent wars have also determined our social experience'.

The Introduction is divided into a series of chronological bites, and it alone would make this collection invaluable to anyone interested in the subject. Overall, the essays present a strong argument for the need for such dramatic responses to armed conflict, and repeatedly the essayists identify the way in which the censorship and the propaganda weapons of the warmongers have

been probed and questioned by a range of very different practitioners.

The volume is organized chronologically, and some idea of the impressively wide sweep of the contents may be gauged by noting that it opens with Mel Ruben's detailed account of a 1994 re-enactment of the 1932 Kurt Jooss ballet, *The Green Table* – an avant-garde piece by a company that was hounded out of existence by the Nazis – and concludes with Jo Henderson's consideration of the use of myth in relation to dramatic engagements with the Falklands War: 'Why then, should this unnecessary war, unprofitable and largely unwanted, have heaped so much glory upon the heads of its instigators?'

In between there are pieces as varied as Edward Braun's excellent analysis of the 'Portrayal of the Army in British Television Drama'; Jonathan Key's 'The Atomic Drama'; Tony Howard on Bond's *War Plays*; Derek Paget with some fascinating revisions to the story of *Oh What a Lovely War*; and Maggie Gale's impressively ambitious account of 'Representations of Women in War Plays by Women, 1935-1951'. In all, a fitting tribute to what must have been an excellent conference, of value to both the specialist and the more casual reader.

JOHN BULL

Duncan Wu

Six Contemporary Dramatists

London: Macmillan, 1995. 179 p. £10.99.
ISBN 0-333-67068-X.

This forthright study considering the work of six distinguished contemporary playwrights – Bennett, Potter, Gray, Brenton, Hare, and Ayckbourn – will be enlightening not only to those in education but also to the larger readership of theatre and television audiences. Wu approaches and attempts to encapsulate the writers' diverse output by employing the two literary principles of English romanticism and Shakespearean tragedy. He readily accepts that not every chosen dramatist is either a romantic or a tragedian; accordingly, he establishes some tenuous connections with selected modern dramas and his frames of reference. One chapter is devoted to each playwright, and here the author pursues and substantiates links between screenplays, television serials, and stage plays.

A major theme of this book is the development and consequent transformation of each dramatist's work due to Thatcherism and the materialist social policies undertaken in the UK from 1980 to the middle 1990s. For example, Wu notes how the work of Brenton and Hare has developed in different directions, despite their two successful writing partnerships and similar views on theatre. However, some coverage of this