

personal poems, take us to New York, the remembered past, the life of poetry, and some other figures from Lady Jane's period. *JANE, Interlinear & Other Poems* is a rich volume, full of intriguing poetry, and its title poem is likely to be added to the line of major Australian long poems of this century.

All of which returns me to my original bewilderment that these four poets seem to be relatively unknown. Yet much the same situation exists for any number of fine poets in Canada: they are only known in a particular region, or to a particular audience; there are just too many good poets for all of them to gain broad recognition; their work has a limited appeal, however good it may be. I suspect the reasons are much the same in Australia. At any rate, I am glad that such small presses as Paper Bark exist to at least get their work out there, and I recommend these volumes as valuable glimpses of what's happening in poetry in Australia today, especially, as they are also such lovely examples of the art of the book.

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ALAN FILEWOD, *THE CTR ANTHOLOGY: FIFTEEN PLAYS FROM CANADIAN THEATRE REVIEW*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993.

People working in the theatre have always known about the immediacy of the theatre and its sensitivity to current events and thought: something that often escapes those in the academies. Given the right conditions—and passion and determination—a play can be written, rehearsed, and put into performance in a matter of weeks; a performance can then be adjusted, adapted, and altered to suit its audience, venue, or the events of the world beyond the stage. And then the script can be passed on, reworked, and reinterpreted by other performers. Good theatre is always at the cutting edge of culture: many of the notions of post-modernism are to be found in Artaud's theatre writing, Beckett's plays, and Grotowski's theatrical practice—all of whom predate currently influential cultural theorists. It's this responsiveness which has, over the centuries, attracted writers normally identified with other literary genres to the theatre, and which keeps those working in the theatre now dedicated to a medium which can be critically unforgiving, apparently elitist (in the West, at least),

emotionally demanding, financially draining, and mostly just damn hard work.

It's in this way that this anthology of plays first published in the *Canadian Theatre Review* impresses with its immediacy of current theatre writing, and the vitality of Canadian theatre practice. *The CTR Anthology* reprints fifteen plays which received their first publication in the *Canadian Theatre Review* from 1974 to 1991. These scripts make up about one fifth of all the plays published during that time by *CTR*, and represent the individual and collective tastes of *CTR*'s editors over this period—Don Rubin, Robert Wallace, Alan Filewod, Natalie Rewa, and Ann Wilson—governed overall by the choices made by Alan Filewod, the editor of the anthology.

There's no unifying thematic or formal criterion for publication in the anthology—rather, the selection shows the diversity of Canadian theatre writing over the last twenty years. As an indication of the range of theatre writing in the anthology, I mention what are for me some dominant themes, but another reader might organise her thoughts differently. The sea resonates in Michael Cook's *The Head, Guts and Bone Dance*, Cindy Cowan's *A Woman From the Sea*, and Hrant Alianak's *Passion and Sin*—in these plays we see Canada's maritime heritage disappearing through ecological degradation and modern alienation from the elemental conditions of our pasts. Other plays present a quirky view of apparently normal life: the drag queen heroine of Sky Gilbert's *Lola Starr Builds Her Dream Home* is a response to the conservative "family values" of the Reagan-Thatcher era in the style of Charles Ludlam's *Theatre of the Ridiculous*; in *Love is Strange*, Paul Ledoux and David Young look at fame and love from the point of view of an obsessive fan; and in *Being at Home with Claude* (just released in Australia in its film version) René-Daniel Dubois writes a two-handed murder story with a twist. Several plays connect political and personal lives, and accomplish that most difficult task of connecting individuals to the broad forces of history convincingly and movingly. *Ten Lost Years* (Jack Winter and Cedric Smith) is memorable in its simple account of the Depression years in Canada; Betty Lambert's *Jennie's Story*, dramaturgically simple but emotionally intense, reveals the horror of the Sexual Sterilisation Act of the 1920s and 30s; Richard Rose and D.D. Kugler's *Newhouse* proposes a sexual plague which becomes the excuse for the implementation of a totalitarian state; likewise *Zero Hour*, by Arthur Milner, plays with the illusions of truth and patriotism fostered by cultures of surveillance—in this case, the CIA. Marie Brassard and Robert Lepage's *Polygraph* is one of the most

accomplished plays in the collection, thematically connecting the fall of the Berlin Wall with the disintegration of several individuals' lives, and providing rigorous formal innovation which interprets the material of the narrative with power and complexity. And of course, such an overtly nationalist anthology contains plays dealing specifically with questions of colonial and post-colonial culture: George F. Walker's *Rumours of Our Death*, which uses techniques of distanciation and comic irony to satirise the colonisation of Canada's cultural and political life, and John Palmer's *Henrik Ibsen on the Necessity of Producing Norwegian Drama*. This last play produced in me sensations of delight at the situation of a British-born, naturalised-Australian reviewer reading a play by an Anglo-Canadian which dramatises a Norwegian playwright lecturing rather ineffectually to the Society for the Encouragement of a Norwegian Theatre. This is just the sort of mix that the settler cultures of Australia and Canada thrive on, and is further represented in this anthology by Banuta Rubess' play about Latvian migrants and jazz music, *Boom, Baby, Boom!* And in the next *CTR Anthology*, I hope to read some scripts from First Nation peoples.

The plays are prefaced with a short introduction by editor, Alan Filewod, which explains the history of the collection, and also provides a fascinating and not unpolemical account of the last thirty years of Canadian theatre. Filewod argues for the recent history of Canadian theatre as one of evolutionary development from a more or less unified "cultural nationalism" to a recognition of cultural pluralism and regional differences. He connects this regional and cultural diversity of Canadian theatre with its experimentalism and movement from conventional textual and literary forms into what is often, in this volume, dazzling theatricality. While this account of Canadian theatre is a persuasive one, coming as it does from someone ideally placed to give such an overview, I'm somewhat suspicious of such a totalising pattern, positing a smooth development towards the desirable goals of post-colonial diversity and multicultural pluralism. Not that there is anything innately wrong with these goals, but such a structure gives an inaccurate view of life in the theatre, which is rarely smooth in its development, and is usually accompanied by much valiant failure, self-referential nostalgia, and generic conventionalism. The great plays and performances, those which define and speak of the spirit of the age, come in spurts, unexpectedly, and can be assisted, but not created, by public policy and informed discussion. It is usually the theatrical collaborations working in the fringe of the mainstream culture, whose plays and performances resonate with power. And these groups are well

represented in the *CTR Anthology*, where regional, fringe, and alternative theatre companies, their writers and performers, predominate. I make this point in spite of finding the collection and its introduction compelling, because the one thing that unites these plays is their very diversity—diversity of subject, form, and dramaturgy. Such diversity suggests a vigorous theatrical culture, despite the continual sense of crisis felt in the theatre, which has been exacerbated in the last ten years with the spectre of economic rationalism threatening the very plurality of theatre writing which this collection celebrates.

Perhaps "theatre writing" is an inadequate description for this anthology—another of its unifying characteristics is its presentation of plays as texts for performance. In reading, one is forced to lift the words off the page, and to recognise what Filewod calls the "textuality of performance". It is laudable to require the reader to do this, but it has its problems for both reader and editor. Indeed, Filewod acknowledges the difficulty of communicating the theatrical experience of the play in performance through the verbal text—"the qualities that attract notice in the first place are the very ones that cannot be captured on the page". It is this element of theatricality which is particularly important in the anthology, as the principal criterion for publication of a script in *CTR* is the existence of a "significant production" of a play. To inform readers about these significant productions, the anthology includes information about the first production of each play, about the playwrights, their collaborators and translators, and expands the conventional textual device of the stage directions to indicate the physical action, setting and music of the play in performance. But such annotation is all too brief in some scripts, and, given the importance of these non-verbal elements of most of the plays in the collection, we need to find new editorial and textual practices to communicate these elements of performance. Certainly as documentation of a play in performance the conventional format is increasingly inadequate.

In its aim to represent the scope of Canadian theatre writing, *The CTR Anthology* is excellent. The theatricality, experimentation, and generic playfulness of the plays collected here makes me wish that a similar volume could be produced in Australia. This lack is as much to do with local publishing policies as with performance practices. The tendency of the major publisher of Australian drama seems to be to pick up the domestic, naturalistic style of plays focussed on Australian identity, an obsession from which the *CTR* plays are liberated. We have no published scripts from the Sydney Front, for example, to compare with pieces such as *Polygraph*, or *This Is For You, Anna*. The

Reviews

publication of Suzanne Spinner and Meredith Roger's *Running Up a Dress*, or Open City's *What Time is This House* are comparable, but are exceptions, and so our facilities for reading and teaching Australian plays (often the only way young Australians come into contact with Australian theatre) are limited as a result. *The CTR Anthology* provides a model for this, as well as an engaging collection of exciting contemporary theatre writing.

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