

QUT Digital Repository:
<http://eprints.qut.edu.au/>



Makeham, Paul B. (2009) *"Men at play : masculinities in Australian theater since the 1950s"* -- By Jonathan Bollen, Adrian Kiernander and Bruce Parr. Theatre Research International, 35(2), pp. 215-216.

© Copyright 2009 International Federation for Theatre Research

Any edition of this kind is going to be selective in what it covers. A surprising omission, however, is any reference here to George Henare, who played a significant role in the development of 'colour-blind' casting in his work at the Mercury Theatre and elsewhere. I would like to have seen a few other acknowledgements, such as of Mary Amoores at Central Theatre in Auckland, who provided a foothold for the members of Theatre Action when they first arrived from the Lecoq school; of Unity Theatre in Wellington, and of the contributions of Ngaio Marsh in Christchurch and Rosalie and Patrick Carey at the New Globe Theatre in Dunedin. But these are quibbles. The book will for many years contribute to an understanding of the development of New Zealand theatre.

Theatre Research International, 34.2 doi:10.1017/S0307883309004660

Men at Play: Masculinities in Australian Theatre since the 1950s. By Jonathan Bollen, Adrian Kiernander and Bruce Parr. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2008. Pp. xii + 215 + 26 illus. €50/\$75 Pb.
Reviewed by Paul Makeham, Queensland University of Technology,
p.makeham@qut.edu.au

Adopting a thematic rather than chronological arrangement, this co-authored book surveys representations of men and masculinity in post-war Australian theatre. Its searching and sophisticated analyses draw upon playscripts, critical records and archival material, including screen versions of stage productions. The study is organized around two distinct periods of Australian theatre history: the 1950s to 1970, during which time a national theatre movement flourished, and the mid-1980s onward. Whilst some attention is given to different genres, discussion centres primarily on realist works from the mainstream. Several plays usually omitted from orthodox theatre histories, such as Barry Pree's *A Fox in the Night* (1959), are given detailed treatments.

Men at Play makes a timely contribution to current social and scholarly debates about masculinity. As Butler, Sedgwick and others have argued, gender is constituted through performative acts, and a resulting premise of this book is that 'masculinity is theatrical' (p. 2). Theatre, moreover, is shown to play an active role in social constructions of gender, serving as a 'laboratory experimenting with and disseminating new ways of thinking about and performing gender' (p. 12). A key insight here is that Australianness itself has largely been defined by and conflated with ideas of masculinity, and the stage, thus, became a site for 'performing the *masculinity* of the national character' (p. 33, original emphasis).

Masculinity is constantly in flux, and the word incorporates complex, socially negotiated images and values comprising 'myths, stereotypes and caricatures' (p. 5). In Australia, the problem of masculinity has specific characteristics, and it is rendered, often, through familiar figures: the bushman and the ocker, the bully and the businessman, the digger, fathers and sons. More recently, it is evinced through the energetically assertive style and sexuality of the 'wog boy'. Several of the plays discussed examine the role of bullying in 'policing' gender norms; others explore the problematics inherent

in masculinity and fatherhood, particularly as these are inflected through indigenous characters, where the absence of the father is associated with a loss of male identity and spiritual knowledge. Often, male violence becomes a mode of emotional expressivity, while an associated habit of inarticulacy prompts a particular form of realist – perhaps Method-inspired – acting style. Some post-war plays reinscribe normative gender roles; others, such as *Lola Montez* (1958), explore gender anxieties and ambivalences, queering stereotypical representations. Later works have been explicit in representing gay men, but the mainstream theatre of today ‘remains a place where gay masculinities have to be presented with the utmost care’ (p. 138).

Theatre Research International, 34.2 doi:10.1017/S0307883309004672

Nick Enright: An Actor's Playwright. Edited by **Anne Pender and Susan Lever.**

Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008. Pp. 224 + 6 illus. €46/\$67 Pb.

Reviewed by *Stephen Carleton, University of Queensland, s.carleton@uq.edu.au*

This book makes an excellent contribution to theatre scholarship at a time when the profile of the Australian playwright seems to be slipping into curious abeyance at the hands of ‘the devising team’. In Enright’s case, this is a particularly fitting tribute because, as so many of the impressive field of scholars, teachers and theatre practitioners the editors have assembled in this collection point out, collaboration was the approach he prized above all others when it came to creating the text. Whilst the volume concentrates debate on Enright’s theatre and screenplays (in forensic summary articles by Veronica Kelly, Jack Teiwes, Jane O’Sullivan, Mary Ann Hunter, Adrian Kiernander, Felicity Plunkett, Julian Meyrick and Pender and Lever themselves), its overarching ambition is to acknowledge the full range of the playwright’s accomplishments, and to acknowledge his legacy as an actor, director and, in the case of the series of personal recollections by George Ogilvie, Sandy Gore, Karen Vickery and Terence Clarke that comprise the second part of the book, a teacher and collaborator.

Pender provides a useful biographical summary of Enright’s career, reminding the reader that he achieved at the very highest level in almost everything to which he put his hand. She cites the recurring themes of ‘family and the plight of the young’ (p. 21) as being the common thread that links most of his work across genre and form. The articles that follow elaborate upon these projects and interrogate the recurring thematics in order to account for the work’s impact. These important essays are critical debates that do not quail from engaging with his works’ flaws or contested reception. Fitzpatrick acknowledges the anodyne mega-musical entity *The Boy From Oz* became in its Broadway transfer, and how this departed from the darker biography of Peter Allen that Enright originally offered to Australian audiences. O’Sullivan critiques Enright’s portrayal of women across his theatre *oeuvre*; Hunter concurs that an elision of female perspectives occurs in the film adaptation (*Blackrock*, 1996) of his complex stage play for young people, *A Property of the Clan* (1994), but points out that his texts have been used extensively by youth theatre groups to instigate discussion about precisely the sorts of sins of commission and omission to which O’Sullivan refers.