

In **NEW AMERICAN DRAMATISTS: 1960-1980**, Ruby Cohn is not so objective. She offers opinions on some of the plays, but, without sufficient clues to establish her critical yardstick, I found her comments of little help. Many of her thirty dramatists worked outside mainstream theatre, but most used a traditional format to the extent that they produced scripts prior to rehearsal. Most of them were, and are, reasonably prolific, so complex plays have to be described in a paragraph. However the book does give an overview of the period which helped this reader to set more familiar playwrights like Kopit, Mamet, and Patrick – and even Neil Simon – in context.

Both these books are part of a new illustrated series called **MACMILLAN MODERN DRAMATISTS** edited by Bruce and Adele King who in each and every editorial preface are at pains to explain that the series is *written for people interested in modern theatre who prefer concise, intelligent studies of drama and dramatists, without jargon and an excess of footnotes.* OK, but I do like some references and a bibliography at the back; Ruby Cohn's book is the only one of the first batch not to include these. Her book suffers thereby.

Pinter, Buchner, Labiche and Feydeau are also in this first batch and I will have read them by next CUE. Meanwhile, to complete the initial look at the American scene, Neil Carson has contributed a volume on **ARTHUR MILLER**. With only one author to deal with, there is space for discussion in reasonable depth. After setting Miller the dramatist in the context of Miller the man, each major play is given a chapter in which Neil Carson analyses the play and discusses the original and some later productions, noting the audience and critical response. He offers his own interpretative comment in a dispassionate way so that any subjective comment in the book is presented as propositions for objective debate. And there is a good bibliography and reference listings to set the curious off on journeys into the playwright's interior.

John English presents **THE CASE FOR ARTS CENTRES** very entertainingly indeed in the form of a transcript of his evidence to *The All Party Committee on the State of Civilisation in the United Kingdom*. He plays fair. The committee – chaired by Sir D.B.B. (a distinguished back bencher) and serviced by Sir C.C.S. (a civilised civil servant) – comprises Lord D.L.P. (a disenchanted life peer), Mr L.W. MP (a socialist MP with fervent convictions), Mr R.W. MP (urbane and civilised, right wing, but a good chap), Mr H.M.I. (a resilient believer in education), Mr C.E.O. (a realistic yet dedicated chief education officer), and Mrs T.L. (the token lady, but a happy choice).

They are frighteningly real and the questions they ask come straight from their attitudes. John English answers cleverly and the committee respond logically, smoothly and predictably. After reading it all, I was ready to rush out and start an arts centre. I suspect that the committee would have filed

the evidence, satisfied with a job well done.

As a script this book is performance ready: I hope that some arts centre will stage it. It would work well on television: John English could play himself and I have had a lot of fun casting the committee. Perhaps starting with Donald Sinden as the knighted civilised civil servant?

I took Donald Sinden's **A TOUCH OF THE MEMOIRS** on holiday and I laughed aloud a lot – and that is something I do not normally do while reading. Actors memoirs can be awful: they are often written in a style of platitudinous insincerity that is only appropriate for backstage visiting on opening nights. Sinden, however, knows the structure of a good tale and he knows how to use timing in the telling. But this is not just an entertaining book. It offers much more insight into the acting process than many a more profound formal text. It is not often that I am prepared to declare a book to be indispensable reading. But I heartily recommend a touch of the Sindens and eagerly await the further volumes – *another touch, yet another touch?* – in due course.

CURTAIN CALLS. Bernard Miles and J. C. Trewin. Lutterworth Press. £8.95 (UK)

AMERICAN ALTERNATIVE THEATRE. Theodore Shank. Macmillan Press £12 (hardback) (UK) £4.95 (paperback) (UK)

NEW AMERICAN DRAMATISTS, 1960-1980. Ruby Cohn. Macmillan Press £10 (hardback) (UK) £2.95 (paperback) (UK)

ARTHUR MILLER. Neil Carson. Macmillan Press £10 (hardback) (UK) £2.95 (paperback) (UK)

Note: The above three volumes are published in MACMILLAN MODERN DRAMATISTS, An International Series of Concise Studies on the Modern Dramatists of the World. Edited by Bruce King and Adele King.

THE CASE FOR ARTS CENTRES. John English. John Offord Publications (City Arts Series) £1.25 (paperback) (UK)

A TOUCH OF THE MEMOIRS. Donald Sinden. Hodder and Stoughton. £7.95 (UK)

CURTAINS!!! or a New Life for Old Theatres edited by Iain Mackintosh and Michael Sell. Photographic Editor: Victor Glasstone. John Offord (Publications) Ltd. £5.95. (UK)

The Curtains!!! project is an offshoot of SAVE Britain's Heritage, from which it has inherited the use of emphatic typography – heavy type, capitals, and, for Curtains!!!, those three exclamation marks. Whoever thought of them had a stroke of genius. Marching across the pages they mesmerise the reader into a state of excited expectancy, as if the show really were just going to start, and one is not disappointed, because the whole thing is done with such panache and professionalism.

Like its parent body, Curtains!!! is in the protest and propaganda business. Its chairman, Iain Mackintosh, describes its aims as 'to search out and identify Britain's finest old theatres and, whether or not they are in use at this moment (and many are not), to marshal evidence and argument that as many as possible should be retained for the pleasure of this and future generations', and explains that it is aimed at two distinct groups – the conservationist lobby and the theatrical profession. The fruits of their work are a book and a small travelling exhibition which was first displayed at the Museum of London during March. The exhibition is quite a modest affair, designed more to whet the appetite than to satisfy it. By good fortune my visit to it coincided with the last of a weekly series of lectures by members of the Curtains!!! Committee; it was by David Cheshire and he showed us lots of nice picture postcards and Sickert paintings of the vanished delights of London music halls before 1914. The exhibition will be seen in other towns and one hopes that it will arouse support for the cause wherever it goes; if there is a local 'Sleeping Beauty' awaiting resurrection, then the Curtains!!! book will have it thoroughly documented.

The authors of the book have attempted to list in a gazetteer all surviving pre-1914 theatres and music halls, including fragments of buildings partly demolished. It contains many photographs and the entries give a description of the building, its history and present condition and use, and an assessment of its merit and future prospects. Stars are awarded – three for 'A very fine theatre or hall of the highest theatrical quality', two for 'A fine theatre or hall which is an excellent example of its type', and one for 'A theatre or hall of some interest or quality'. The findings of the survey are summarized thus: 'It is thought that there were slightly over 1000 theatres in use in Britain between 1900 and 1914 . . . Of these the state or fate of about 1100 have been established. Ninety-eight or so are in use, that is 9%; 85% have been demolished or irretrievably altered. This leaves approximately 6%, 69 in fact, that are not in use as theatres to-day but are restorable. Of these 54 rate ** or ***, 11 in London, 35 in the rest of England, and 4 each in Scotland and Wales.' The gazetteer is followed by maps and chronological lists of all starred theatres. Then there are biographies of the principal theatre ar-



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