



more renowned than they were in 1948. Every town with a theatric past to add to their illustrious theatric present should have a book like this.

My lighting for Michael White included a smash hit (*Sleuth*), a scandal (*Soldiers*), Glenda Jackson's only ever flop (*Fanghorn*), an opportunity to work with Hilton Edwards (*Philadelphie Here I Come*) and *La Mama* (*Tom Paine*), the chance of pushing a single preset choke control to its limits (*So What About Love*) and one (*Man from the West*) that is not even mentioned in his autobiography although it played to nothing but **EMPTY SEATS**.

I therefore enjoyed the book enormously, reading it in a single train sitting. That I could do so is a tribute to a writing ease which suggests that, if he had not been seduced by theatre, Michael White might well have succeeded at his original determination to become a novelist. However this would have been a pity. Novelists we have in plenty, but entrepreneurs with theatrical flair are scarce. Alas, we are developing a theatre that does not encourage them – and will not until we can induce a more flexible approach to public accountability.

Anyone who has lived through the last quarter century of British theatre, or aspires to contribute to the next, will find much

fascinating background detail. The big agonies are here and so are some of the highs. But impresario aspirants beware: Michael White does not dwell on the daily grind of getting so many productions on to the stage. Only one quibble: a chronology of his productions could have raised this book from the important to the essential shelves in any library of theatre history.

Sandstorms, earthquakes, avalanches, erupting volcanoes, crashing trains, sinking ships – disasters of all kinds (and the heroic rescues that resulted) were the visual core of melodrama. Bernard Shaw, as a nineties critic campaigning for a new drama, referred to the flood in *'The Two Little Vagabonds'* as *that silly sensation scene* with the result that its artist designer Bruce Smith acquired the nickname that explains the title of the biography **"SENSATION" SMITH OF DRURY LANE** by his grandson Dennis Castle.

Smith was apprenticed in 1872 and painted until 1934 when he retired at the age of eighty. These were the days when several artists would contribute to a production, each being responsible for designing and painting their own scenes. He worked mainly in the paint room at Drury Lane and the Macklin Street Studios, sharing the frames with all the great scenic artists of his

age including Hawes Craven, Henry Emden, Joseph Harker and William Teblin – and in due course Alick Johnstone became his apprentice.

Although particularly renowned at Drury Lane, both for sensation scenes and pantomime transformations, Bruce Smith also painted for the straight playhouses and for Covent Garden opera seasons. His long professional hours were part of a full life that included seventeen years in the Volunteers (rising from private to major), comedian (being vice-president of the Concert Artists Association for thirty years) and *casanova* (to use the word favoured by the book's subtitle).

His biographer gives us a composite picture of all these activities, capturing the flavour of Victorian backstage and its interaction with the world 'outside'. Sensation Smith was one of the great artist designers. What a pity that none of his models have survived!

I recommend readers of Hugh Morrison's **DIRECTING IN THE THEATRE** to start with pages 157 to 159. If these 'conclusions' had been printed as a preface, I suspect that I would have found rather more focus in a text which is full of buried truisms. Even when first published in 1973, this book seemed to be promoting a directorial