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American Drama, 1945–2000: An Introduction. By David
Krasner

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course, all reference works require a series of compromises: the editor, unlike a reviewer, has to be selective, in part because of restraints imposed by the publisher.

Without question, the *Guide* is a major reference work. It is an accurate, up-to-date compendium of historical information. For a one-volume encyclopedia, it is a scholarly treasure. Wilmeth has done an admirable job of editing the *Guide*, which reflects his virtues as a scholar of American theatre history. He has remained true to his vision for the *Guide*, which provides concise, authoritative information. I therefore urge all of us to make sure that the new edition is ordered by our college libraries, and for anyone who wants an encyclopedia on American theatre and popular entertainment, I highly recommend the paperback edition at a quite decent price of \$24.99.



American Drama, 1945–2000: An Introduction. By David Krasner. Blackwell Introductions to Literature. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006; pp. xiii + 216, 6 illus. \$74.95 cloth, \$24.95 paper.
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Reviewed by Natka Bianchini, University of Maryland, College Park

David Krasner's primer, *American Drama, 1945–2000: An Introduction*, is a helpful, albeit cursory, overview of the seminal plays and playwrights of the period. Invited by the publisher to author this volume, Krasner's is the most recent offering to appear in the Blackwell Introductions to Literature series. The series' mission, as stated on the inside cover, is to "provide concise and stimulating introductions to literary subjects," offering "books on major authors . . . , as well as key periods and movements" designed "to inspire newcomers and others: non-specialists . . . or general readers." The book fulfills this mission adequately, giving a comprehensive introduction to later twentieth-century American plays and playwrights. Its shortcomings therefore stem mostly from adhering to the series' admittedly narrow mission, which prohibits lengthy analysis of individual plays or movements, and precludes the offering of all but the most surface historical context.

The book's five chapters are organized chronologically, each concentrating on a ten- to fifteen-year period. The first chapter, titled "Politics, Existentialism, and American Drama, 1935–1945," serves as a preface to the subsequent four chapters, and explores how the drama of this period laid the groundwork for American plays in the second half of the century. Krasner focuses on two types of play here, both of which, he argues, emerged during a period of "unprecedented self-examination of what it meant to be an American" precipitated by the Great Depression (4). He categorizes these plays as either political/progressive (exemplified by Clifford Odets) or American/existentialist (Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* and *The Skin of Our Teeth*, Robert Sherwood's *The Petrified Forest*,

William Saroyan's *The Time of Your Life*). For both categories, a handful of plays are considered in detail; Krasner provides a plot summary, dialogue excerpts, and analysis relating the play to the theme. Beyond these representative examples, other significant works are mentioned in brief paragraph summaries (such as Langston Hughes's *Mulatto*), while additional plays are named in passing only. Krasner assigns a central theme to each of the remaining four chapters, a tool that often hinders more than it helps (such as in Chapter 4).

Chapter 2, "Money Is Life" (1945–1959), "explores the way in which characters of this period yearned for mainstream belonging, a belonging that was inextricably bound to notions of financial prosperity and the American Dream. This era was dominated by some of America's greatest playwrights, and Krasner focuses on them: Eugene O'Neill (his later work), Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Lorraine Hansberry, and William Inge. Wherever possible, he emphasizes the theatrical history of the play, providing information on actors, directors, and designers associated with significant premieres. Chapter 3, "Reality and Illusion," examines plays produced between 1960 and 1975, a period characterized by revolt against the mainstream. Here Krasner looks at the ways in which American drama challenged the norm through both form and content. He broadly considers the influence of the European "absurd": analyzing both its effect on individual playwrights such as Edward Albee and Arthur Kopit, as well as examining its influence in African American theatre, using Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman* and Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro* as case studies. Krasner's focus is much wider than in the previous chapter, reflecting the diversity of dramatists and movements committed to rebellion (such as the Black Arts Movement, gay liberation, and Chicano theatre, to name a few presented here).

Chapter 4, "Mad as Hell," seeks to unify plays and playwrights of 1976–89 through their expressions of rage. The source of that rage is drawn widely from political and social upheavals of both decades: Vietnam, Watergate, AIDS. Within this paradigm, David Mamet is the defining playwright, although significant time is also spent on Sam Shepard, and Krasner includes an interesting comparison of Marsha Norman's *night Mother* with Maria Irene Fornés's *Mud*. In this chapter, the book's thematic structure ceases to be a useful or coherent method of organization. Significant attention is focused on women playwrights (Beth Henley, Wendy Wasserstein, Tina Howe), on both Wilsons—Lanford and August—and on plays that Krasner labels "postcolonial." Much of the analysis is insightful, but distantly and tangentially related to the chapter's theme, if at all. The final chapter, "The Body in Pain," looks at ways in which contemporary (1990–2000) American playwrights emphasize and explore the body on stage with a particular emphasis on the "representation of pain" (148). Krasner considers the work of seven playwrights as particularly emblematic of this phenomenon: Anna Deavere Smith, John Guare, Paula Vogel, Josefina Lopez, Suzan-Lori Parks, August Wilson, and Tony Kushner.

The book's thematic categories might be useful to the student reader or the nonexpert, but their utility is limited. In later chapters it seems as if equal time is spent on plays that fall outside the given theme as on those that are illustrative examples of it, a hindrance that leads to an abundance of nonsequiturs and a

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somewhat disjointed reading experience. Nevertheless, the book's encyclopedic scope (particularly strong is its inclusion of minority writers) certainly exposes the nonspecialist to a catholicity of styles and movements, and provides a fruitful starting point from which one can explore individual works further.



Cast Out: Queer Lives in Theater. Edited by Robin Bernstein. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006; pp. xxi + 232. \$60 cloth, \$22.95 paper. doi:10.1017/S0040557408001300

Reviewed by Richard M. Buck, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, retired

In this collection of twenty-two essays, aptly titled *Cast Out: Queer Lives in Theater*, editor Robin Bernstein has included the memoirs of a variety of performers, playwrights, behind-the-scenes professionals, critics, and spectators that give the reader an insight into their personal and creative lives, exploring the interconnections among theatre, queer culture, sexual preferences, and how attitudes toward homosexuality in the theatre and popular culture changed during the second half of the twentieth century. As Jill Dolan eloquently points out in her Foreword, “Hopefully, *Cast Out*'s personal histories will provide hope to young queer people who won't have to make their way as blindly as so many of us did not so long ago” (vi). She concludes that, “All the stories in *Cast Out* describe how theater provides a place to work out, painfully or proudly, what it means to live a queer life, onstage, backstage, and from the house” (xi).

In her introduction, Bernstein offers a “pre-Stonewall” history of the professional theatre world, when a sort of “don't ask, don't tell” attitude held sway, through the women's and gay liberation movement, to the end of the twentieth century, when, with so many public comings-out of well-known performers, some thought “that the twenty-first century would constitute a ‘postgay’ period in which sexual identity was irrelevant” (8). So far, as some of the contributions to this collection point out, this has turned out to be the case in only the more sophisticated areas of popular culture. The contributors vary from those who have maintained professional lives on the stage to those who chose to move to other theatre activities, such as directing or playwrighting, and those who are no longer or never were active in the theatre, but whose queer lives have been indelibly influenced by the theatrical experience as a spectator. Bernstein writes: “*Cast Out* ultimately *affirms* the suggestion that theater may offer queer pleasures to anyone, regardless of identity or sexual practice” (16).

The volume is divided into three sections. Part I, “Everything Is Possible,” tells how performance and queer passion can intersect in unexpected and life-changing ways: the influence of a beautiful drag queen on Peggy Shaw; how Kevin Winkler's obsession with Bette Midler has colored his entire life; and the way that summer theatre schooled Jim Provenzano in “Varsity Fagdom.” Part II,