

The book does an excellent job highlighting female desire and female sexual discovery onstage, but there was an absence of depicting sexual male desire. I partially understand, as many mainstream productions are from the male gaze and, throughout history, sex has been shared through the male perspective. However, I was hoping that the book would still express the need to make sure men feel safe in the depiction of sex onstage and question the audience on how to create a sexual space from the heterosexual male perspective that dismantles hierarchy and patriarchal norms.

I would recommend this book to directors, intimacy coordinators, actors, artistic directors, educators and anyone in the development process and creation of theatre. I believe that this book is revolutionary and should be on the shelves of every university library. It provides an excellent scope of contemporary sexual theatre history and shares a lens for artists to transform the view of sex onstage in the future.

Theatre Research International 49:3 doi:10.1017/S0307883324000282

Good Nights Out: A History of Popular British Theatre since the Second World War. By Aleks Sierz. London: Bloomsbury, 2021. Pp. 228. £95 Hb; £22.99 Pb.
Reviewed by Tomoko Seki, Waseda University, tomoko.seki.0105@gmail.com

When you take the Heathrow Express to central London and get off at Paddington (or maybe transfer to St Pancras, Piccadilly Circus or one of the other central stations), one of the first things you may see is an advertisement for a popular theatre in the West End. Those ads for glittering productions appear one after another and make tourists' eyes sparkle. While London's commercial theatres are a prominent feature of the city and an unmissable presence in the theatre world, surprisingly little academic research has been done on them. In *Good Nights Out: A History of Popular British Theatre since the Second World War*, Aleks Sierz attempts to fill this major gap in the study of contemporary British theatre.

Sierz is one of the leading critics of contemporary British theatre and has published several books on the works of contemporary playwrights. These include *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (2001), which covers the work of young playwrights who emerged mainly in the 1990s, such as Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill, and *Rewriting the Nation: British Theatre Today* (2011), which focuses on the relationship between new British playwriting and the political, social and economic changes in the UK since the 2000s. In his latest book, he deals with commercial theatres.

One of the most notable aspects of the book is that it takes an unprecedented view of post-war British history: a cultural, ideological, life-historical and economic approach to commercial theatre as a phenomenon. Due to the large number of works covered and the varying amount of previous research on each work, a detailed and in-depth analysis of them all has inevitably not been achieved, but his viewpoint is nevertheless sharp. He defines 'Britishness' in theatre history by focusing on seven key concepts (war, crime, sex, family, class, history and fantasy), categorizing the productions and tracking the changes in the depictions of those concepts and in the audience reception. The book reveals the new aspects of 'Britishness' from a macro perspective, which could not have been captured from the micro perspective of what Sierz refers to as the 'literary gaze'.

With this macro perspective, Sierz explores the essence of the 'audience'; in other words, he discusses what it means to be 'popular', what elements audiences fundamentally require of the theatre, and what the audience actually is. While 'popularity' can be easily seen in figures (number of performances, total attendance, ticket sales and so on), the causes of these results

are complex and easily influenced by uncertainties such as luck, coincidence and timing, and it is thus difficult to analyse them completely. Not every cause is covered (that would be impossible), but at least some material aspects of the 'audience' and their desires are depicted in this book, namely that the 'audience' is a social existence and their desires are deeply rooted in their daily lives and realities, no matter how much commercial theatres might serve as 'escapism'. *Good Nights Out*, therefore, argues that popular theatre is of, by and for people – the two words have the same etymological origins.

Finally, the reader will also find that the 'Britishness' discussed in this book is ultimately universal, because the audiences for British commercial theatre are not only domestic patrons but also international tourists, and because its output is exported abroad, though Sierz does not address this in detail. For example, in Japan, some of the plays mentioned in *Good Nights Out* are so popular (almost to the point of threatening home-grown commercial theatre) that going to see 'authentic' productions in London has become a kind of status symbol amongst their most enthusiastic fans. Thus it can be said that the appeal of those productions goes beyond 'Britishness'.

Having read *Good Nights Out*, some theatre-goers or theatre-lovers may perhaps be tempted to count how many productions have been missed and point out how much the book thus lacks. However, that is precisely what Sierz intends to accomplish: to stimulate the memory and love of theatre-goers in London in order to develop research into commercial theatre. Throughout the book, he seeks to shed new neon light on popular theatre, which has thus far not received much academic interest.