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## 19 Drama

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## 19 Drama

*Dorothy Chansky*

In accepting the MLA Award for Lifetime Scholarly Achievement in 2005, J. Hillis Miller praised “those students and faculty these days who are most attracted by the contextual side of literary studies, by what is called cultural studies, and by investigation into the milieu of ideological assumptions about race, class, gender, politics, and history within which literary works were and are written, within which they are embedded, and which are embedded in them.” He then expressed his “immense respect [for] the shift away from literary study toward the study of film, television, popular music, video games, and other features of popular culture. . . . Anyone who looks with a candid eye can see that literature is on the way to becoming more and more a thing of the past, *ein Vergangenes*, to misappropriate Hegel’s term a little.”

If this combination of shift and respect is alarming to anyone in literary studies, it is a bit *déjà-vu/ho-hum* for scholars of drama and theater, or perhaps I should say for scholars of drama *in* theater, that slippery site where text and context are so patently mutually constitutive. Accordingly, I am arranging this chapter to reflect the centrality of cultural studies in considering drama. Sections titled “Plays” and “Playwrights” come first, but the latter part of the essay is a broad category I’m calling Performance/Production/Praxis/Perspectives. I have collapsed the theory/history/criticism divide to reflect precisely such a collapse in most works that appear under any of the more traditional rubrics. The section covers books and essays that investigate drama and performance in historical, theoretical, occasionally performative ways,

locating drama in its glory and discontents on stages ranging from playhouses to museums to the street to wharves (yes, Provincetown, lest we think that nontraditional and site-specific venues comprise a recent innovation), private homes, big-top tents, and screens both large and small. Regarding the “Plays” section, I am eschewing the list of new work that opened onstage (heady, but of necessity a bit of a laundry list) for an admittedly much shorter list of lauded plays that appeared in print (although many opened this year as well), which is to say important plays that became available as literature. That said, the list is partial, although it covers a sweep of genres and writers ranging from relative newcomers to seasoned names.

The year emitted an early zinger via Philip Auslander’s sobering observation in *TDR*, “No Shows: The Head Count from the NEA” (49, i: 5–9). Concocting a fictional *Jeopardy* category called “Arts Participation,” he offered an imaginary player the “answer” of 78. The question? “What is the percentage of the adult population of the United States that did not attend the theatre at all in 2002?” Based on the most recent NEA *Survey of Public Participation in the Arts*, published in 2004, the aggregate figure for musical and nonmusical theater attendance is 22.3 percent (dropping to 12.3 percent if we leave out the musicals). In other words, about 63 million Americans see about 3.6 theatrical performances a year, spending about 10 hours to do so, the latter being the same number of hours the average American spends watching television over a three-day stretch. Since part of Auslander’s argument is that we need to take the mediatized seriously, he reminds us that these figures do not include time spent watching movies, DVDs, videos, or television broadcasts of plays. Nor, of course, do they reflect time spent reading plays or other performance-influenced literature. Nonetheless, if you are reading this and saw more than four theater performances in the past 12 months, you already know you are in rarefied company.

### *i* Playwrights

Milestones in American drama included the deaths of Arthur Miller and August Wilson. Three new books about Miller honor his memory and a late interview with Wilson caught him post-medias res, in dialogue with one of his obvious heirs, Suzan-Lori Parks (“The Light in August,” *AmTheatre* 22, ix: 22–78).

The biggest of the 2005 Miller books is Christopher Bigsby's *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* (Cambridge). This 489-page "journey through his work" provides a critical essay on each of Miller's plays, as well as examinations of screenplays, novels, short stories, radio plays, and hybrid play/novel version of *The Misfits*. Bigsby offers just enough biographical information to contextualize the personal issues lending urgency to the various texts' themes, but his focus is Miller's writing, and his thesis is that Miller's abiding answer to the question of how to go on while staring history, death, and an uncertain future in the face "is that with God dead, who but man can create the values by which he must then live?" That the question is answered with a question underscores one of Bigsby's throughlines, namely Miller's cultural Jewishness as one of the anchors of his work. Indeed, the final chapter names Miller as America's "Jewish intellectual . . . guide, philosopher and moral conscience." Paralysis (a word occurring at least 90 times in the book) is a symptom of the difficulty Miller's characters face (or avoid) if they are to honor the basic human contract, for which Bigsby's shorthand is "There is no immunity . . . no separate peace." If Bigsby fails to take up the question why Miller's women are virtually always helpmeets, facilitators, or medically certifiable invalids (he admits once that "the male characters occupy centre-stage, the women suffering the consequences of their moral confusions"), this book is still a major resource and a treasure trove of insights.

*Arthur Miller's America: Theatre and Culture in a Time of Change*, ed. Enoch Brater (Michigan), is a collection of essays drawn from papers and interviews presented at an international symposium at the University of Michigan, Miller's alma mater, on the occasion of his 85th birthday in 2000. The book is framed by Brater's chapter about Miller's university years (where he cut his teeth as a political activist writing for the student newspaper) and late interviews of the playwright by Brater and *New York Times* critic Mel Gussow. Scholars take a variety of approaches to a variety of kinds of issues raised both by Miller's writing and, in one case, by his persona. Mike Sell ("Arthur Miller and the Drama of American Liberalism," pp. 23–35) parses Miller's liberalism, noting the challenge of supporting humanitarianism for the long haul while also avoiding the trap of "timeless values." Arnold Aronson ("The Symbolist Scenography of Arthur Miller," pp. 78–93) suggests that a scenographic understanding of "enclosure and isolation working together" in Miller's plays

may account for the greater success of his work in Europe than in the United States, where productions are often hamstrung by open designs. Jonathan Freedman explores the cultural phenomenon “Arthur Miller” as a new model of Jewish masculinity in which “the *yeshiva-bukher* metamorphosed into the high-culture intellectual” who can both get the American girl and be seen as sexy. (Heirs include Woody Allen and Alexander Portnoy.) In his highly original “From Technology to Trope: *The Archbishop’s Ceiling* and Miller’s Prismatic Calling” (pp. 94–108) Andrew Sofer finds the play “Miller’s subtlest piece of metatheater.” Set in an unnamed Eastern European police state and featuring a room with a ceiling that may or may not be bugged, it is both a drama of causation (events force a writer to take a stand) driven by objects such as a manuscript and a gun, and also an instance of “the *prismatic* dramaturgy of power,” offering variations on a theme minus a central character, a climax, or a facilitating object. The bugging device nonetheless exists in the minds of the characters, each of whom “embodies a different accommodation with power, a set of strategies that has congealed into a way of life.” Here all bets are off concerning a coherent subject and theater emerges as the technology par excellence for exposing “the chimera of psychological unity.” This book does nod to feminism. Interventions include Deborah R. Geis’s “In Willy Loman’s Garden: Contemporary Re-revisions of *Death of a Salesman*,” pp. 202–18, which looks at plays that “export actual characters (or references to actual characters) from *Salesman* . . . [to] allow for interrogation and deconstruction of its assumptions about culture and character.” For instance, Rosalyn Drexler’s *Room 17C* has Linda taking over selling on the road, proving far more successful than Willy ever was. In Paula Vogel’s *The Oldest Profession*, three aged prostitutes discuss business as well as their lonely client Mr. Loman, who has eschewed suicide and survived into dementia circa 1980. In “Vaudeville at the Edge of a Cliff” (pp. 164–73) Toby Zinman names character Lyman Felt’s “testosterone-driven male fantasy” in *The Ride Down Mt. Morgan*. And Elinor Fuchs (“Theorizing *Salesman*,” pp. 219–35) describes how students in her dramaturgy class at Yale located the artifices of gendered behavior by casting two men to portray Happy and the Girl at the restaurant, then reprising the scene with a female actor, thereby exposing the same performativity across the sexes and the vicious patronizing inherent in boys being boys.

Enoch Brater also published *Arthur Miller: A Playwright’s Life and Work* (Thames), a book largely aimed at a nonscholarly readership. It’s

lit-crit lite (but not empty) on the major plays, concluding with (too-) brief looks at *Resurrection Blues*, in which media bid on the right to televise the crucifixion of a newly returned Jesus, and *Finishing the Picture*, about a film director dealing with an unstable star. The 70 black-and-white illustrations are terrific, as is Brater's inclusion of enough biographical "dirt" to be tantalizing but not trivializing. Samples: Miller's first child with Inge Morath was born with Down's syndrome and immediately institutionalized. Miller never mentioned him in his memoir *Timebends*, nor does Daniel Miller appear in the "official biography of either parent." In another (more positive) passage, we learn of Miller sending a newly completed manuscript of *The Crucible* to Elia Kazan, with whom he had had a famous falling-out over Kazan's naming names to HUAC. When Kazan responded with enthusiasm about staging the powerful new work, Miller shot back, "I didn't send it to you because I wanted you to direct it. I sent it to you because I want you to know what I think of stool-pigeons." These few events bring to life the activist who was also in ongoing analysis, described decorously by Marilyn Monroe as "a better writer than a husband."

Susan Glaspell does not fully come to life until about halfway through Linda Ben-Zvi's *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times* (Oxford), but there is an archival reason for that in this compelling major achievement in Glaspell scholarship. Meticulously researched, it uses primary evidence to trace every detail of Glaspell's growth as a writer, a feminist, and—to use Ben-Zvi's favorite word—a "pioneer" in theater and drama. Ben-Zvi offers interpretations of all her subject's plays and novels, but her main task is to study the life and mind that yielded those works. The author warns us that knowing *Trifles* and *Suppressed Desires* does not mean knowing Glaspell and she more than proves her point. Nine novels, a biography of George Cram Cook, and a Pulitzer Prize for her play *Alison's House* only begin to reveal what a major presence Glaspell was in American letters. Her dramaturgical innovations and her steadfastness as a disciplined writer and reliable team player argue for her being the Provincetown Players' primary consistent ingredient for stability. When Glaspell does begin to emerge as a rounded person, we see a charming, pretty, well-behaved woman who nonetheless demands her own space, drinks too much, and ends up with two men who would have drained the emotional and financial resources of most lesser mortals. One reason Glaspell seems a sketchier presence in the earlier than the later part of the book is that she saved letters from others who failed to save hers

to them. Later on there is more direct evidence in clearer, and sometimes snarkier, voices. (Ben-Zvi was also able to interview people who had known Glaspell.) Glaspell nonetheless emerges with true grit and true grace intact as she pays her own way to the end, bails out Cook's troubled son and grandson, and stands up to Hallie Flanagan Davis with regard to authors' rights when Davis would have denied royalties to the author of a Federal Theatre Living Newspaper just because he also happened to be a Federal Theatre employee in another capacity (as was Glaspell). *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times* is a model of how to write a responsible scholarly biography that is also good enough to take to the beach.

Ben-Zvi also wrote the introduction to a new edition of Glaspell's *The Road to the Temple* (McFarland), the playwright's 1927 biography of George Cram Cook. The major critical achievement is Ben-Zvi's underscoring the literariness of the biography. Researchers have tended to take Glaspell's descriptions of herself in *Temple* as verifiably factual, failing to appreciate that the resulting image of her playing "Galatea to Jig's [Cook's lifelong nickname] Pygmalion" is a bit of character construction by a highly skilled novelist and playwright determined to put the focus on a giant, Cook, who thought and inspired much but wrote and finished little. Readers interested in a further exploration of Glaspell's working relationship with Cook will value Marcia Noe and Robert Lloyd Marlowe's "*Suppressed Desires and Tickless Time: An Intertextual Critique of Modernity*" (*AmDrama* 14, i: 1-14). Both plays feature a couple caught up in the progressive thinking of the moment, in one case regarding psychoanalysis and in the other modern scientific thinking about the limits of traditional idealistic notions concerning the cosmos. Noe and Marlowe assert that both plays challenge the excesses of modernism. More interestingly they discuss how both also focus on the limits of representation.

Just as Ben-Zvi warns readers to avoid the trap of looking for literal, transcribed autobiography in the work of the artful Glaspell, Doris Alexander does all she can to derail such connections in *Eugene O'Neill's Last Plays: Separating Art from Autobiography* (Georgia). By unearthing letters, journal entries, newspaper articles, and numerous city directories, she shows all the ways in which *Long Day's Journey*, *The Iceman Cometh*, and more briefly *A Moon for the Misbegotten* are not useful as literal biography or "as a quarry for accurate facts" about O'Neill's immediate family. The playwright's goal was "a wider truth that he had perceived

in his own suffering as one of them and in his compassion for theirs,” something she doesn’t hesitate to name as “universal.” Most interesting is the argument she builds for finding O’Neill and his third wife Carlotta, not the senior O’Neills, in the parents in *Long Day’s Journey*. The actual record shows that it was the playwright’s wife and not his mother who loathed theater and life on the road and that his own son Shane was probably the slacker who was on his mind in crafting Jamie. Alexander’s point, though, is that lack of information or failing to keep a tally sheet has nothing to do with creating great drama, and people who look for a biographical grid to lay over the texts are barking up the wrong tree.

Will Beth Henley go the way of Susan Glaspell—a Pulitzer Prize winner who fades from memory? Not if Gene A. Plunka can help it. His *Plays of Beth Henley: A Critical Study* (McFarland) develops the thesis that Henley’s plays are neither about dysfunctionality nor wackiness for their own sakes, nor largely “gothic,” both of which have been frequent critical tropes. Rather, Henley’s “vision is fundamentally centered in a deep exploration of the modern neurosis.” Plunka sees Henley’s roots as Chekhovian, with her work “remind[ing] us that the act of striving for love, self-esteem, or dignity typically goes unfulfilled, yet one must be able to laugh at life’s absurdities or else succumb to its neuroses.” Especially interesting is his discussion of *Signature*, a play set in a *Blade Runner*-esque Los Angeles in 2052 where people are unable to commit to work or love. *Abundance*, which is set in the West, beginning in the 1860s in Wyoming, traces how dreams are taken away from two hopeful young women and how they regroup with an ugly vengeance. An interview with Henley, conducted by Jackson R. Bryer, appears in *AmDrama* (14, i: 87–109).

There is also more to Gertrude Stein than many critics are willing to acknowledge as far as her drama is concerned. In *Mama Dada: Gertrude Stein’s Avant-Garde Theater* (Routledge) Sarah Bay-Cheng takes on those who “treat Stein as a literary anomaly, critiquing her plays as if they were mistitled poetry or abstract prose.” Not only does Bay-Cheng situate Stein as “the first genuine avant-garde dramatist of her country,” but she skillfully traces three Steinian concerns that all emerged around 1895 and all show up in the plays: avant-garde dramaturgy (characterized by its negation of organized religion and belief in God as well as its nonrepresentational use of language); cinema (replete with cuts, edits, and the “non-reproduction of reality,” since what film presents is not real life but celluloid and light and since Stein often pursues a “continuous

present” rather than an ongoing continuum); and queerness, emerging as a whole way of life—distinct from mere same-sex intercourse—with Oscar Wilde’s trials. Bay-Cheng is a masterful guide through the difficult *Dr. Faustus Lights the Lights*, where she elucidates Stein’s horror at what technology has done to human existence. Avant-garde heirs include Stan Brakhage, Richard Foreman, Adrienne Kennedy, and Maria Irene Fornes, to name just a very few of those for whom Stein is, as Bay-Cheng concludes, “the mother of us all.”

Equally impressive but differently focused scholarship on Stein appears in Leslie Atkins Durham’s superb study *Staging Gertrude Stein: Absence, Culture, and the Landscape of American Alternative Theatre* (Palgrave). Durham’s focus is major productions of Stein’s work, which the author explores with great attention to casting, design, staging, and cultural ideology, not all of which serve in every instance to render Stein’s texts as open as they are on the page. Durham is sensitive to the ways in which Stein wants her readers and audiences to work for their pleasure, but Durham also realizes that sometimes that work is about letting go and opening up, and she herself hears in the libretto to *Four Saints in Three Acts* “an invitation to nondiscursive and irrational sensual play.” *Staging Gertrude Stein* opens with a wonderful biographical chapter that offers more than data or “background.” The tensions, passions, and challenges that made Stein the person she was show up in her work, and by *work* I mean her self-promotion as much as her art. Durham is sensitive to felicitous choices that enrich Stein’s texts in performance, such as the decision to use an African American cast in the original production of *Four Saints*. She is equally clear about productions, no matter how famous and well funded, that shot themselves in the Steinian foot, such as the Santa Fe Opera’s 1976 *Mother of Us All*, which reduced Stein’s revolutionary, doubt-laden, and homosexual-themed libretto to an occasion for nostalgia and reactionary celebration. The chapter on the Wooster Group’s *House/Lights* offers one of the most insightful and user-friendly readings of the piece I have ever encountered.

Another queer playwright’s work gets a fresh rereading in a new monograph by Jeff Johnson. *William Inge and the Subversion of Gender* (McFarland) argues that Inge’s plays all subvert gender stereotypes even as they appear on the surface to reinforce them. Johnson coins the term “gendermandering” for “the intentional undermining of expected gender roles for the dramatic purpose of politically and socially destabilizing social norms.” Johnson believes Inge’s work is subversion embedded

in traditional dramaturgy and that he is “much more than a regional playwright,” as his “depiction of a superficial, wistfully idealized pastoral Heartland serves mainly as a pretext for his devastating deconstruction of it.” Johnson’s sure-handed reading of the major works is persuasive. Doc and Lola in *Come Back, Little Sheba* look like a pragmatist and a romantic respectively, but in fact he is all bubbling lust and rage under the surface while she really relishes orderliness and control. *Bus Stop*’s Bo is a virginal little boy in cowboy’s clothing while Cherie is tender enough to expose her vulnerability while doing so precisely because she is tough enough to know the score. This shape-shifting at the heart of what passes on the surface for normalcy reveals the instability of both the norms and the putatively two-dimensional characters in Inge’s *œuvre*. Chapters on minor works and short plays round out the book.

Tennessee Williams is well served in Michael Paller’s highly readable *Gentlemen Callers: Tennessee Williams, Homosexuality, and Mid-Twentieth-Century Drama* (Palgrave). Paller’s project is to examine the gay and lesbian (there are two in *Something Unspoken*) characters in Williams’s plays “through the compound lens of his life and times.” The result is a book that deftly triangulates biography, cultural history, and literary analysis. Paller returns repeatedly to Williams’s “tension between the need to conceal and the urge to reveal,” noting that the playwright never hid his own homosexuality but was keenly aware of the cultural penalties (not to mention Broadway’s own codes) about how and how much to portray gay life. Paller offers an informative and lucid history of antigay laws, roundups, firings, and medicalization by the federal government, local police, and the American Psychiatric Association. He is especially piqued by post-Stonewall critics who take Williams to task for being what no one can help being: a product of his own time. Careful readings of about a dozen plays are beautifully handled with the pragmatism of the dramaturg (which Paller is) blended with the insight of the critic and the informed optic of the historian.

Other good work on Williams appears in volume 7 of the *Tennessee Williams Annual Review*. Mark Bernard’s “Punishment and the Body: Boss Whalen, Michel Foucault, and *Not About Nightingales*” examines the “economy of punishment” the warden uses throughout the play. By relying on physical torture and failing to use the more effective method of surveillance, Whalen fails to maintain control. Williams’s later bullies (Stanley Kowalski and Boss Finley) “become more cunning and dangerous.” Allean Hale’s discussion of *Three Plays for the Lyric Theatre* argues

that these later one-acts are “anti-literary” and use theatrical effects such as music, dance, and stage effects to accomplish the playwright’s goals. Brian Parker mines Elia Kazan’s director’s book and correspondence to construct a troubled history for *Sweet Bird of Youth*. The play was a success with critics and audiences, but Parker contends that neither director nor playwright really saw his vision fulfilled, as Kazan, “an alpha-type, aggressive and macho,” had little sympathy for Williams’s interest in fear of aging and artistic failure. The *TWAR* also contains a previously unpublished Williams story, “His Father’s House,” in which the young writer creates a world of faith and violence, with an emotionally unstable and possibly developmentally challenged teenager at its heart.

In another piece of Williams scholarship, Ehren Fordyce historicizes the idea of hospitality to discuss refuge and home in Williams’s last play, *The Remarkable Rooming-House of Mme. LeMonde*, which was published posthumously in 1984. “Inhospitable Structures: Some Themes and Forms in Tennessee Williams” (*JADT* 17, ii: 43–58) notes the irony of Blanche DuBois needing to depend on strangers when refuge with the family went out of style after World War II and “the mobile couple, rather than the rooted and extended family, [became] the primary social unit.” The world (“Le Monde”) of *Rooming House* features a more mature and nonrealistic manifestation of domestic refuge gone awry. Here incest, forced homosexual relations, patronizing cruelty, and a female monster who kills the three males in her house embody the play’s “dramaturgical structure of inhospitality: its principle of elimination.” Fordyce reads the piece as a fable about the nature of the (modern?) world.

Like Williams, Edward Albee enjoyed about a decade of fame and fortune in critics’ eyes before Broadway and the New York dailies gave him the cold shoulder. Albee’s career, however, rose like the proverbial phoenix and this journey is the subject of editor Stephen Bottoms’s “Introduction: The Man Who Had Three Lives,” the opening essay in *The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee*. The essays are arranged in roughly chronological order in relation to the plays they discuss. All are sure-handed and all are by senior scholars in American drama. Philip C. Kolin’s study (pp. 16–37) of the early one-acts sees them as—to paraphrase Harold Clurman’s assessment of Clifford Odets’s best-known work—the dramatic birth cry of the 1960s. *Zoo Story*’s Jerry is “the precursor of the radical left, the Hippies, the Vietnam War protestors.” Matthew Roudané (“*Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*”:

Toward the Marrow," pp. 39–58) makes the bold assertion that *Virginia Woolf* is Albee's "most affirmative play," since George and Martha clear away the illusions that have hampered their lives for two decades and go forth at dawn ready for a new beginning. In one of the most challenging essays in the collection, Gerry McCarthy in "Minding the Play': Thought and Feeling in Albee's Hermetic Works" (pp. 108–26) reads Albee's plays in terms of music, arguing for structure and counterpoint not only as means of assessing the texts, but as a way to understand the somatic, emotional, and affective work of the plays in performance. J. Ellen Gainor's superb "Albee's *The Goat*: Rethinking Tragedy for the 21st Century" (pp. 199–216) begins by asserting the play's goal of "using bestiality as an aberration to make homosexuality appear normal by comparison." She ultimately works around to a reading of *The Goat* as a cry about the agony of separation and othering, of humans from nature but also of humans from each other within capitalism.

Another playwright who fell out of critical favor is Martha Boesing, who cofounded the feminist collective At the Foot of the Mountain (ATFotM) in 1974 and wrote or coauthored more than two dozen plays for and with members of the group. Lynne Greeley's article "What Happened to the Cultural Feminists? Martha Boesing and At the Foot of the Mountain" (*TS* 46: 49–65) recuperates this artist, who was both a Marxist and a champion of women's shared experience. By using distancing techniques such as masks and episodic structure, as well as invoking emotional response via a combination of performer self-disclosure and audience participation, Boesing's work managed to draw on both Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud. Greeley takes on the materialist feminist critique that ATFotM's work aimed only to universalize women's experience (a critique in part responsible for the breakup of the company) and points out the irony of present-day critics and cultural feminists arriving at many of the same points that Boesing and her company did decades ago.

Recuperation is also on Nicholas K. Davis's mind in his essay "Go Tell It on the Stage: *Blues for Mister Charlie* as Dialectical Drama" (*JADT* 17, ii: 30–42). James Baldwin's play is often regarded as a failure for its minimal number of narrative events, simplistic pitting of black against white, and overt bigotry. Davis argues that the play's brilliance lies in its refusal to let any character glom onto a single social identification and stick there. For instance, the wife of the white supremacist murderer briefly allies herself with other exploited wives, who are black. Her return to

her husband's side is motivated by economic dependence, one of many examples Davis offers of how Baldwin's work stages "the regional, sexual, economic, historical, and ethical complexity of America's racial crisis."

"The need to reveal and the need to conceal" (recall Paller on Williams) are also the "polar forces" that define Adrienne Kennedy's writing, according to Claudia Barnett in "'An Evasion of Ontology': Being Adrienne Kennedy" (*TDR* 49, iii: 157–86). The nearly identical wording is intentional, as Williams was an early idol for Kennedy. Barnett sees Kennedy's work as an ongoing development of multiple selves that are both one person and impossibly contradictory at the same time. By using alter egos, Kennedy builds hybrid characters that all add up to a "composite self." In another eerie echo of Williams, Barnett's essay contains a previously unpublished story by Kennedy, "Milena's Wedding," in which a first-person narrator who is both a liar and a dreamer reports on interactions that may or may not have taken place anywhere other than in his imagination. Other work on Kennedy includes Nita N. Kumar's "Dramatic Trans-Formations: The Surrealism of Being Black and Female in Adrienne Kennedy's *The Owl Answers*" (*JADT* 17, ii: 59–70). Kumar sees Kennedy's surrealism as a far cry from the joyous state imagined by André Breton. In *The Owl Answers*, "the surrealism is a sign and a symptom of deep individual and racial pain and traumas, and does not lead to any form of resolution of contradictions." Philip C. Kolin's *Understanding Adrienne Kennedy* (So. Car.) should be useful to teachers and first-time readers of Kennedy's richly complex work.

It is a toss-up whether Carol Allen's wonderful book about roughly a dozen African American playwrights belongs under the rubric "Playwrights" or as part of "Performance/Production/Praxis/Perspectives." I'll foreground the playwrights by putting it here, but *Peculiar Passages: Black Women Playwrights, 1875 to 2000* (Peter Lang) is as important for the historical arc of the culture in (and against) which its subjects wrote as it is for the excellent literary criticism it offers. Beginning with Pauline Hopkins's 1879 *The Underground Railroad* and concluding with chapters on Adrienne Kennedy and Ntozake Shange, Allen demonstrates how these writers embrace hybrid forms, fly under the radar of mainstream (read white or Broadway) theater in order to reach local audiences, and resist "media-driven alterity," that is, ways of portraying blackness that would garner more publicity and productions but would express less authenticity and artfulness. Ironically, by the time of the Black Arts movement of the 1960s, playwright Alice Childress would remain on

the fringes of what won recognition as black theater precisely because she insisted on tropes and topics that were invisible to many reviewers intent on seeing only naturalism. Allen points out that “naturalizing black female sexuality is radical activism” and that none of Childress’s heroines achieve “unfettered victory” by the ends of the plays. Rather, they exist like variations on a theme of irrationality and inhabit a world that is inconsistent, unfair, and on the move. Likewise, Allen’s reading of Angelina Grimké’s *Rachel* points out the limitations of reading the title character as a realistic girl who “gives up” motherhood rather than raise children in a world of injustice and lynchings. Instead, Allen urges us to see Grimké’s drama as a saint play, in which biological reproduction is less important than caring for the community and in which “she who gives up something precious to guard and love her . . . race typifies motherhood.”

The single major African American female playwright not covered in Carol Allen’s otherwise synoptic study is Suzan-Lori Parks, who is the subject of two engaging essays. Verna Foster’s “Suzan-Lori Parks’s Staging of the Lincoln Myth in *The America Play* and *Topdog/Underdog*” (*JADT* 17, iii: 24–35) reads these two well-known plays as companion pieces that arrive at very different conclusions. While *The America Play* is, on its surface, the less realistic of the two, Foster sees in it a clear move from history that derives from hearsay and “what people want to believe” to a reclamation of “thuh real thing from thuh echo.” The superficially more user-friendly *Topdog* actually leaves audiences needing to unpack metaphors and having to face the inevitably depressing repetition of historical modes. Rena Fraden’s essay is a meditation on meaning in Parks’s *œuvre* but also on her (Fraden’s) own obsessions with Parks the person and Parks the wordsmith. “A Mid-Life Critical Crisis: Chiastic Criticism and Encounters with the Theatrical Work of Suzan-Lori Parks” (*JADT* 17, iii: 36–56) talks about being possessed by Parks’s plays, interviews, critical writing, and persona. Parks insists in interviews that her concern is not with “meaning” but rather with action—with what her characters *do*. Nonetheless, Fraden knows that Parks wants her audience to dig and continue to uncover responses and ideas in the encounters she stages. Fraden finds herself moving in two directions as she experiences Parks’s plays: forward with “a sort of inevitability of the sort that propels a common sense view of history” and also in a dizzying vortex of violence, dismay, and hope as racial and national identities collide and collapse.

Race and ethnicity are central but varyingly deployed over a decade in Philip Kan Gotanda's drama, as Ann-Marie Dunbar demonstrates in "From Ethnic to Mainstream Theater: Negotiating 'Asian American' in the Plays of Philip Kan Gotanda" (*AmDrama* 14, i: 15–31). Both Dunbar and Gotanda resist the response phenomenon in which plays by minority groups authorize, in the minds of white audiences, their creators to speak for the entire ethnic or racial group. Dunbar sees a progression to increasingly universal (or American) themes over the course of Gotanda's work.

Finally, Mamet's *Old Neighborhood*, comprising three acts that can also stand as separate one-acts, gets a sophisticated reading by Howard Pearce in "David Mamet's *Old Neighborhood*: Journey and Geography" (*AmDrama* 14, i: 46–62). Pearce uses Husserl and contemporary archetypal theorist James Hillman to offer alternatives to looking for a unified character in the Bobby Gould(s) of *Neighborhood's* three parts—a Bobby Gould who may or may not be the same Bobby Gould who appears in *Bobby Gould in Hell* or *Speed-the-Plow*. Memories, sensations, and experiences yield character (in both senses of the word) but not necessarily consistency, especially across time and space.

## ii Plays

John Patrick Shanley's *Doubt: A Parable* (TCG) won the Pulitzer Prize for drama as well as the Tony for Best Play. The four-hander pits a nun/headmistress of a Catholic school in the Bronx circa 1964 against the priest who coaches the basketball team and may be diddling one of the male students. Crises of faith abound. It is a detective story of sorts, but the big question becomes less "Did he or didn't he?" than "What's really at stake?"

Will Eno, author of *Thom Pain (based on nothing)* (TCG), was touted as "Samuel Beckett for the Jon Stewart generation" by *New York Times* critic Ben Brantley, and this play, which was awarded a First Fringe Award at the Edinburgh Festival, was a runner-up for the Pulitzer. The solo piece features a rambling encounter that may or may not be a character study but that definitely both draws the audience in and offends it. Sad tales about little boys losing their dogs and being stung by bees and about older boys losing their girlfriends and self-confidence (which masquerade as autobiography) alternate with fourth-wall-breaking encounters with the audience that turn into brush-offs. It's lean and it can be mean.

August Wilson's final play, *Radio Golf*, premiered at the Yale Rep in May, enjoyed a limited engagement at the Mark Taper Forum over the summer, and was published shortly after the playwright's death at 60 from cancer (*AmTheatre* 22, ix: 87–108). *Radio Golf* completes Wilson's cycle of one play per decade of the 20th century dealing with African American life, mostly in Pittsburgh. One of the pleasures of this play is its use of locations and people from earlier work, most notably the house Wilsonphiles will recognize as belonging to Aunt Ester, the central character in *Gem of the Ocean*. In *Radio Golf* Wilson's theme again is the deadly pursuit of the American dream at the expense of African American memory and community. If "radio golf" sounds like a weird concept, that's part of the point. You can be a media celeb with your own talk show, yes, but isn't there something counterintuitive about getting off the green and onto the airwaves to help people work on their swing? Needless to say, getting one's swing back is what's important, and the characters invested in PR, redevelopment, Starbucks, personal publicity, and the like either fail or must learn to see the ways in which sacrificing the elders and the *lieux de memoire* of their community is a kind of slow-burning, self-inflicted cultural genocide.

Eric Bogosian's *Humpty Dumpty and Other Plays* is the polymath's seventh anthology or single-play publication with TCG; he is also the author of two novels and two other books of prose and the recipient of a 2004 Guggenheim Fellowship. Bogosian is a solo performer as well as a screen actor. The book's title play in the collection features four hyper-successful, urban, chic 30-somethings kicking back in a rustic rental in upstate New York when all the electricity and phones die. The extended outage begins to feel like the result of terrorism, and locals form border patrols. How the fair-haired four respond speaks volumes of the distance we've come from *It Can't Happen Here* to Homeland Security. Maybe not far enough. *Griller* pits the woes of success and individualism against the need for family ties and finds the suburban self-satisfied seriously wanting. A ponytailed Boomer with two dysfunctional sons gets a warning he doesn't grasp from the younger one, who gives him a copy of *Death of a Salesman* for his birthday.

Richard Foreman has segued over the decades from enfant terrible to éminence grise of off-off Broadway. The auteur's *The Gods Are Pounding My Head!* (aka *Lumberjack Messiah*) was published in *AmTheatre* (22, iv: 37–45). Foreman's program notes for the January–April production called the play "elegiac." The title character, Dutch, can no longer

manage to fell the trees he is supposed to, as his axe will not, um, cut it. Yes, it is a metaphor. Dutch worries about the depth and intricacy of his fellow humans, who seem to have been replaced by other humans who are “thin somehow. Just surface.” What’s an average humanist in existentialist’s clothing to do? Nothing can replace the experience of a Foreman work staged by Foreman, for whom writing the play is only part of his “collaging” method, but better this text in print than nothing.

Noah Haidle’s dark comedy *Mr. Marmalade* (*AmTheatre* 22, ii: 37–55) features four-year-old Lucy (played by an adult), who has an imaginary boyfriend, the title character. Innocent enough? Not when you realize (rapidly) that Lucy’s games mimic all the evils present in the adult lives she observes. Mr. M. is abusive, deceptive, cheats on Lucy, hits his assistant, fails to follow through on what he promises, and makes sure that his little girlfriend knows the score and the ropes. Lucy’s mother and teenage babysitter are the less than ideal role models in her world, but they hardly created sexism and abuse all by themselves. The play ran to favorable reviews in New York with Mamie Gummer, Meryl Streep’s daughter, as Lucy.

Julia Cho is a playwright whose work balances a singular, zingy voice with the sort of solid dramaturgy that audiences, critics, and playwrighting pros can admire. *BFE* (*AmTheatre* 22, vii: 45–61) premiered at New Haven’s Long Wharf in April and moved to Manhattan’s Playwrights Horizons the following month. Its main character, 14-year-old Panny, is an Asian American teenager living with her agoraphobic mother and gentle but repressed uncle. She’s trying to figure out beauty and dating in a world of girlfriends who have been known to undercut you and guys who love your phone voice and recoil from your Asianness. She’s also living in a neighborhood with a kidnapper on the loose and writing (school-assigned) letters to a Korean pen pal whose malapropisms and interest in blond hair strike her as just too stupid. That is, until Panny gets a hard lesson in objectification and globalization. For what it’s worth, the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of America recently circulated a list under the rubric “Important (Best?) Contemporary Plays from North America and the UK Since 1990, with a Few Things Snuck in from the Late ’80s.” *BFE* is on the list.

### iii Performance/Production/Praxis/Perspectives

Pride of place among anthologies must go to David Krasner's *A Companion to Twentieth-Century American Drama* (Blackwell). The 33 essays fall into four broad categories: chapters about individual playwrights; chapters foregrounding the main trends in drama of one or two decades; chapters about what might be called genres (e.g., solo performance drama); and chapters about categories of drama (Asian American, Native American, lesbian and gay, the Black Arts Movement). I admit that I had planned only to dip into this book to report on it, but I cruised through almost half of its 550 pages before putting it down. The essays are treasure troves for beginners but also contain sources and material that even a specialist can admire. Many of the contributors are "stars" in the areas on which they wrote chapters, and others are visible up-and-comers or experts across several topics in American drama.

For anyone who has ever wrestled with the "does drama belong in English or in Theatre" dilemma (or, perhaps more important, for anyone who has not) Mark Hodin historicizes the question with nuance and insight in "'It Did Not Sound Like a Professor's Speech': George Pierce Baker and the Market for Academic Rhetoric" (*TS* 46: 225–46). Baker, famous for instituting playwriting and what would now be called workshop productions at Harvard, began his career teaching rhetoric (read "service courses" or "practical courses") just as literary study was becoming subject to the rules of rarefaction and scientific rigor. He also taught dramatic literature. Baker's brilliance (for which, Hodin argues, he was not appreciated) is that he balanced the humanist desire for artistic excellence (the ivory tower part) with the pragmatic skills needed to craft a play with legs (the showbiz part) and was apparently unwilling to sacrifice either one. His English department colleagues could not seem to wrap their minds around living dramatists' dilemma: the need to honor cultural conventions while also maintaining "an underlying independence and integrity." Hodin emphasizes that the modern professoriat performed (and performs) precisely the same tightrope act. Their disavowal, in the name of some kind of literary purity, of the rhetoric common to professors and theater practitioners alike (relevance, engaging students, etc.) ultimately drove Baker to the new Yale School of Drama in the 1930s. The rest is theater history.

Race and racialization are the focus of one monograph, a special issue of *Theatre Journal*, and several smart essays. Mary Brewer's *Staging*

*Whiteness* (Wesleyan) looks at more than a dozen American (and an equal number of British) plays of the last century to trace how drama has both propped up and critiqued ideas of normative whiteness. Consider *Our Town*, in which the Stage Manager maps the village for the audience, making it clear who lives on the other side of the tracks (the poor, non-Protestants, nonwhites, or intermediary whites) and shores up a status quo with lines like “I don’t have to tell you . . .” Brewer coins the term “variegated White” for a character such as Rocky, the Italian bartender-cum-bouncer in O’Neill’s *The Iceman Cometh*, who “embodies the paradoxical notion that one may be white and yet racially distinct from the category of Whiteness.” Trying to behave like the all-American he aspires to be, Rocky dons a kind of whiteface but is repudiated by native-born Protestants who see a “blackness” in him when the chips are down. Brewer praises Amiri Baraka’s *Dutchman* for othering whiteness and making “the Black perspective on Whiteness visible.” In a similar vein, Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* uses Belize to show the dangers of believing the false promises of internalizing white values and behaviors, “showing the carrot of assimilation to be a rather hollow offer.”

*Theatre Journal*’s special issue on black performance (57, iv), ed. Harry J. Elam Jr., begins with “A Forum on Black Theatre: The Questions: What Is a Black Play? And/Or What Is Playing Black?” (pp. 571–616). Participants include playwrights and performers such as Anna Deavere Smith, Robbie McCauley, and Suzan-Lori Parks and scholars David Krasner, Jim Hatch, Judith Williams, Joni Jones, E. Patrick Johnson, and Nadine George-Graves. Perhaps the best way to sum up the verve and complexity of the discussion is to record Jim Hatch’s recapitulation of the thorny nature of the question(s) and to offer an excerpt from Parks’s performative, playlike (in both senses) answer. First Hatch:

“Am I playing White? Is this a White play?” I have never heard these questions from a white actor. The dominant culture assumes that “white” is universal; hence its adjective is invisible. A black actor or critic might ask, “Is Lorraine Hansberry’s *The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window*, with only one black character, a black play? Is *The Blacks*, by Jean Genet, black because all the characters are?” For some if the cast of Tennessee Williams’s *Glass Menagerie* is black, it becomes a black play.

## Now Parks:

- A black play is double voiced but rarely confused. . . .
- A black play bows to god then rows the boat ashore. . . .
- A black play is a white play when the lights go out.
- A black play is a white play when you read between the lines. . . .
- A black play takes shape just outside the reaches of your white understanding, no matter what your color, baby. . . .
- A black play sometimes puts its foot in its mouth, but, hell, a black play sometimes gots mouths to feed and shoe leather tastes like chicken when yr HONGRY. . . .
- A black play don't forget that in the 1980s mtv didn't want colored faces on its airwaves.

Other fine work on race in American theater and drama includes Daniel H. Foster's "From Minstrel Shows to Radio Shows: Racism and Representation in Blackface and Blackvoice" (*JADT* 17, ii: 7–16), which argues that the heyday of minstrelsy (roughly 1842 to the 1920s) was the nadir of racial representation and was blackface at its most virulently racist. Previous blackface performances and later black impersonation in the early days of radio were far more about uniting poor people around shared experiences than about looking down on blacks. Foster investigates "why the *aural element in minstrelsy shifted from being the primary signifier of reality to the secondary one*, and how with this change the minstrel's blackened face changed *from more of a ritual mask to a representational costume*" (italics in original). Peach Pittenger studies a star's fate in the 1939 Broadway production of *Mamba's Daughters*, a melodrama by DuBose Heyward and Dorothy Heyward. "Ethel Waters and Racial Stereotypes: Crafting a Career in the Pre-Civil Rights Era" (*JADT* 17, i: 25–45) unpacks Waters's difficulties as an aging actress with a star persona but little acting training and an increasing problem with weight. The role, which combined the stereotypes of Mammy and tough, violent, primitive black, offered Waters both an escape and a trap. She had the chance to express something of her own past and experience as a fighter, but she was recuperated into a melodrama that allowed white audiences to continue to see both the role (a woman who murders the man who rapes her daughter) and the actress (inexperienced in "straight" drama and identified with the character's behavior) as Other.

Julia A. Walker's achievement in *Expressionism and Modernism in the American Theatre: Bodies, Voices, Words* (Cambridge) is a wholesale overhaul of how to understand the expressionist plays of O'Neill, John Howard Lawson, Elmer Rice, and Sophie Treadwell. Rather than trafficking in wannabe German expressionism, these playwrights were working with the basic assumptions of the then well-known and very American expressive culture movement, the popular legacy of S. S. Curry's writings on and teaching of expression (read oratory), which in turn owed something to François Delsarte and his acting theories (spoofed in the Grecian urn turn in *The Music Man*). The basic idea was that speakers needed to overcome the muscular and social strictures of everyday life in order to achieve effective, personal, nonmechanical self-expression while also "restor[ing the] body to the natural rhythms of the universe." The four playwrights who are Walker's focus in the second half of the book all saw disharmony and disjuncture in a world rapidly being overtaken by technology (shades of Stein?), and they staged just that in their writing. For example, Rice's *The Adding Machine* and *The Subway* convey the worlds of their main characters "through pantomimic images, disarticulated sounds, and punning word play [displaying] worlds of chaos and spiritual degradation." Treadwell's use of sound, music, and voices coming from offstage throughout *Machinal* are famous. For Walker, *The Hairy Ape* is more about "modernity's malaise" than about class inequities. There is another piece to the argument, however, and Walker builds her case carefully and powerfully through a reading of the evolution of copyright law. Drama was protected to some extent, but only for its published incarnations until the early 20th century. Since plays were largely written for performance and often sold outright to acting companies, they could be pirated by adapters, paraphrasers, you name it. Once performance could be recorded, however (think wax cylinders for the voice and film for the body), the law was able to recognize it as "its own separate legal entity from the dramatic text." Playwrights were no longer conjoined with production and could write privately, planning to sell (or not) later on; they could, in short, see their work as literary and thereby join the modernist movement. That the technology about which they were so anxious was the very thing that enabled this break is the great irony that fascinates Walker.

Irony fascinates Bruce Kirle, too, in his you'll-never-think-the-same-way-about-this-topic-again opus *Unfinished Show Business: Broadway Musicals as Works-in-Progress* (So. Ill.). Described by the author as "a counterhistory that celebrates the openness of the form and questions

what becomes privileged and what does not,” the book carefully dismantles the traditional story of the “development” of the American musical. The party line has emerged as a history privileging text over performance, creating a kind of teleology in which the integrated musical (book, music, lyrics, acting, and choreography all supporting one vision or theme) trumps the collaborative, highly performance-determined and often presentational way in which earlier musicals were crafted. In other words, in this schema, *Show Boat* pointed the way to the work of Rodgers and Hammerstein, which is superior to the sort of nonlinear, bubbleheaded stuff in which the likes of Al Jolson, Fanny Brice, Eddie Cantor, and Bert Lahr used to wow ’em. And the integrated musical is supposedly superior because it has a text at its root and the text can be “authenticated.” What Kirle points out is that whatever text has been encoded for the book musicals we have been taught to worship, the road to publication was paved by performance collaborators who had everything to do with what worked, what got thrown out or rewritten, and what became the “original” way to do it. Anyway, he asks, “are any texts, stripped of performance, reception, and their cultural moment of production authentic?” Ethel Merman would look wooden to today’s audiences; Zero Mostel endeared himself to audiences in *Fiddler* and drove the cast and writers crazy with his incessant ad-libbing. Is *The Producers* a good musical? Box office says yes, but mainly when Nathan Lane and Matthew Broderick are onstage together. So in what precisely does the “greatness” inhere? If *A Chorus Line* created a kind of paradigm shift in how to do a blockbuster musical, who exactly were the creators? If it really is a book musical, who is responsible for the book? If Bob Fosse used vaudevillian tropes to indict American media celebrities in *Chicago* but the public ignored this in favor of “audience adoration of its two divas, Gwen Verdon and Chita Rivera,” what are we to make of authorial intent? It does, indeed, razzle-dazzle them, but how? What is the “authentic” *Show Boat*—the 1927 version, the 1946 Broadway version, the 1966 Lincoln Center revival, the 1994 Hal Prince version, or the 1936 film, which differs from all the stage versions as well as from the 1951 film? If your answer is to go back to 1927, keep in mind that chunks of what was there are not encoded anywhere, as they were ad-libbed, and by design. Is there a “message” here? “In effect, the development of the form is an ongoing sociology of American culture.” Consider, as just one example, the evolution of *Oklahoma*’s Ali Hakim in the popular and professional imagination from obviously Jewish, since the role was originated by Yiddish theater star Joseph Buloff, in a 1940s bid to “whiten” the Jewish other. By the time the film was made in the

1950s, the role was played by Eddie Albert, as the site of otherness had shifted in the Cold War. Is it any surprise that the 2002 Broadway revival featured Aasif Mandvi, an Arab, in this mythic bid for the farmer and the cowman to be friends?

One place where the farmer and the cowman did come together was at circuit Chautauquas, the subject of Charlotte Canning's *The Most American Thing in America: Circuit Chautauqua as Performance* (Iowa). This hugely popular, 48-state performance phenomenon packaged faux education, skits, plays, novelty acts, and music to offer rural, white, Protestant Americans what they took for "a true depiction of a United States that was predominantly homogenous, unconflicted, and stable, thus making real through performance a much-longed-for America." Shows toured and typically arrived in a town that had booked them (with a guaranteed advance) to set up shop under a tent for three days to a week. Theater historians interested in the intersection between scripted drama and Chautauqua's insistence on morality (women could be fired if their demeanor seemed suspect, with no hard evidence necessary) will not be surprised that it was the Ben Greet Players offering Shakespeare that broke the ice in 1913 and paved the way for other, lighter dramatic fare. With literature as the base of what the heartland was willing to accept as "culture" and with Ben Greet's spare settings, the supposed taint of excessive costuming, spectacle, fancy lighting, and heavy makeup was minimized. Shakespeare had made his Chautauqua debut as a lecture topic, thereby making the plays "hard to disdain."

What Chautauqua fans feared was the thrill featured in mainstream melodrama. R. Rene Branca looks at four of the 19th century's finest in "Melodrama, Convention, and Rape" (*AmDrama* 14, i: 32–45) to explore how rape itself was no big deal as a dramatic incident. Rather, audiences wanted to be assured that characters were behaving in a combination of actual social expectations and dramaturgical predictability. How characters responded to threats of rape are indexes not merely to what audiences found titillating but also to what they understood as proper. I was fascinated, for example, to learn that a woman who fainted (as many characters did) just prior to being raped was more likely to be a credible witness on her own behalf, as actually recounting events might sully her reputation. No recall = no need to have a salacious or clinical vocabulary = the appearance of chastity and innocence.

The issues facing Americans who used performance to deal with immigration, assimilation, and identity a century ago are with us again,

but with a different insider/outsider divide, other countries of origin, and, of course, globalizing technologies. Enter Guillermo Gómez-Peña, whose *Ethno-Techno: Writings on Performance, Activism, and Pedagogy* (Routledge) combines solo dramatic scripts, theory, a detailed explanation of how he works with performers, and an impassioned cry for compassion in a world of what he repeatedly calls the “mainstream bizarre.” Gómez-Peña describes himself and his fellow travelers as “bastard children of two humungous nouns”: “heterodoxy” and “iconoclasm.” If he and his ilk are considered transgressive, he invites us to consider the hohum television world of Jerry Springer, Howard Stern, MTV’s *Jackass*, or *X-treme Sports* and ushers us into his world of “new fears of TWAL (traveling while Arab-looking)” while repeatedly reminding readers via his “Fusion English” that the center may not be where the media want us to believe it is and that despite glib invocations of a wired planet, the vast majority of Latinos have no access to the Internet (even if they are lucky enough to have access to electricity), so what are we talking about? I’m including an excerpt from his script *Brownout 2* to suggest how criticism, theory, and performance text can merge in his work:

“He thinks like Octavio Paz,”  
 wrote the theater critic of the *Boston Globe*  
 “but behaves like Geraldo Rivera on acid.”  
 But if only I had known the gringo implications of  
 “*mi casa es su casa*”  
 meaning, *y tu país también*  
 or “*Hasta la vista babe*,”  
 meaning, die fuckin’ meskin  
 Or *vaya con dios vatous locous*,  
 meaning, deported back to the origins.  
 The South is always the origin  
 and crossing the border is the original sin.  
*Placazo:*  
*Un emigrante mas equals un Mexican menos. . . .*  
 Delete!

Lest this strike readers as the work of a marginal cultural presence, let me point out that Gómez-Peña is a frequently heard voice on NPR.

Speaking from the margins with no holds barred was the project of the many playwrights, actors, and directors who found an artistic haven in Greenwich Village’s Caffè Cino, arguably the granddaddy of

the off-off-Broadway theater movement. Wendell C. Stone's *Caffe Cino: The Birthplace of Off-Off-Broadway* (So. Ill.) is an engaging chronicle of Cornelia Street's little venue that could. Founded in 1958 by a pudgy dancer from Buffalo whose family may or may not have had Mafia connections, the *caffè* (Joe Cino liked the Italian spelling) was originally intended as a gathering place for like-minded people, but the occasional poetry reading almost instantly gave way to staged plays. Joe Cino somehow dodged the endless police and neighborhood complaints and raids against coffeehouses, and he supported his venture largely through day jobs, as admission charges were nonexistent to nominal and coffee was cheap. A short list of playwrights whose work premiered at Caffe Cino includes Tom Eychen, Lanford Wilson, Robert Patrick, Doric Wilson, Sam Shepard, John Guare, and William M. Hoffman. The Joe Cino who emerges in this book reminds me of a latter-day Jig Cook. He gave everything to the tiny Village performance venue that enabled so many to get started, although his own artistic output was minimal. Many of the artists he supported were gay, although Stone believes "Joe Cino did not have an obsession with homosexuality. He simply had an extraordinary largeness of spirit that allowed other people to explore, set other people aflame to express what they never had been allowed to before." Like Cook, Cino was upset with his artists pursuing uptown productions and money, and like Cook he was a substance abuser (alcohol for Jig, drugs for Joe) who died young, leaving the theater world changed forever.

In 1965 Caffe Cino and Café La Mama were jointly awarded an Obie. At the same ceremony, Walter Kerr received "an Anti-Obie for his 'outstanding disservice to the modern theater': for his determined resistance to the works of Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, Pirandello, O'Casey, Brecht, Sartre, Ionesco, Genet, and Beckett; and for turning his skills instead to the promotion and maintenance of a commodity theater without relevance to dramatic art, the imagination, or our age." Wendell Stone speculates that Gordon Rogoff and Richard Gilman "may have been the instigators of the award to Kerr." Rogoff and Gilman are a definite team in *The Drama Is Coming Now: The Theater Criticism of Richard Gilman, 1961-1991* with a foreword by Rogoff (Yale).

Gilman was at the top of his game from the 1960s through the mid-1980s, an era when a critic could write for *Newsweek*, *TDR*, *Village Voice*, and the *Nation* and also do a stint as drama critic on PBS with no one blinking an eye at his combined erudition and journalistic crossover.

(Jonathan Kalb comes to mind as a present-day heir, but this model is rare these days.) Gilman also taught at Yale for 23 years, retiring in 1999. His idols all appear in the anti-Kerr list, and his nemeses were Miller, Williams, and Albee, “the three of them forming a triumvirate of world-renowned inept American dramatists.” Gilman pulled no punches and took no prisoners. He ridiculed the Performance Group’s “fashionable inauthenticity” and called the Living Theatre’s *Antigone* “heavy-handed, amateurish in the full pejorative sense . . . [and] making its political points . . . with the utmost sneering self-righteousness.” In Rogoff’s words, Gilman “simply won’t book a seat on the great American hype-machine that insists on seeing good in everything.” Because this book comprises selected shorts, as it were, one is under no obligation to read it all or to read it all at once to get a sense of Gilman’s articulate iconoclasm. And because the essays and reviews are culled from a 30-year span, there’s a chance for Gilman to make return visits to playwrights and plays. Seven years after Tennessee Williams’s death, Gilman wrote in the *New York Times* that after Williams “there was no clear artistically obnoxious line between normal and abnormal, no excuse for evasion,” concluding that Williams was a master at integrating metaphor into his plays and “gave us more than any other American playwright.”

A number of well-argued essays highlight the (never static) role of audiences in constructing meaning in the theater, both at the level of individual production and as a cultural phenomenon embedded in a particular era or moment. Jeffrey H. Richards focuses on how theater producers negotiated troubled political waters to keep their enterprises afloat amid divergent political factions and warring class interests among their audiences. “Politics, Playhouse, and Repertoire in Philadelphia, 1808” (*TS* 46: 199–224) traces how staging and design could render British fare legible as American patriotism and how entertainment nearly always trumps politics once an audience chooses to go to the theater. Moving forward chronologically, Maura L. Cronin-Jortner considers the appeal of the Jonathan character for American audiences between roughly 1828 and 1844. Her “Expansion, Expulsion, and Domination: Jonathan’s Spatial Tactics on the Jacksonian Stage” (*JADT* 17, i: 61–78) makes a persuasive case for why and how the traditional, plain-spoken Yankee character morphed into one who hogged space—onstage and culturally—in a way that reflected the resource-draining, land-grabbing entitlement that typified his audiences’ desires. In “Selling the Bird: Richard Walton Tully’s *The Bird of Paradise* and the Dynamics of

Theatrical Commodification” (*TJ* 57: 1–20) Christopher B. Balme uses a long-forgotten 1912 Broadway production to investigate the theatrical popularity of a show whose value had nothing to do with “modernist-driven accounts of aesthetic advancement.” The play staged a cross-cultural encounter between white and native in Hawaii with its “sympathy” playing out as a bid for separate but equal. The native Hawaiian heroine was played by Laurette Taylor over 30 years before she etched herself in our cultural memories as Amanda Wingfield. Balme argues for investigating how theatrical products “resonat[e] with existing ideological structures,” warning that historians will miss too much if the only criterion for investigation is “canonicity in which attention is focused on the aesthetic component defined by the players themselves.” Casting a culture-wide net, Susan Bennett writes in “Theatre/Tourism” (*TJ* 57: 407–28) that scholars ignore the workings and cultural significance of mega-hits at our peril. By focusing only on drama that seems important to local communities of in-the-know viewers and critics, scholars remain ignorant of the tourist tastes, desires, and consumer patterns that account for at least half the tickets sold on Broadway and virtually all sold to “Broadway” shows in Las Vegas. “Cultural tourism” (looking for cultural events while traveling) has yielded a “merged entertainment-retail sector” run by producers who understand that the competition for theater ticket dollars is not just opera or ballet but more likely to be professional sports or a Billy Joel concert. Likewise interested in the tastes of nonspecialist audiences, Erin Striff invites readers to rethink the audience appeal of essentialist politics when combined with star power and “event” marketing. “Realism and Realpolitik in Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues*” (*JADT* 17, iii: 71–85) asserts that an arguably compromised feminist message is preferable to no feminist message at all when the play “attracts non-traditional theatre audiences, as well as inspiring them to care about women’s issues.”

In “The Death of the Avantgarde” (*TDR* 49, iii: 10–42) David Savran contends that with deconstruction and poststructuralism the hegemonic tools of choice as far in the trickle-down intellectual chain as journalists and undergraduates, there is no longer an avant-garde in the political and rebellious sense that there was in the days of, say, Caffe Cino. Style and consumer niche characterize the public’s understanding of groups that mainstream newspapers are now all too happy to cover and praise, thereby abetting them in their own commodification and well-publicized participation in “a kind of rootless, cosmopolitan avant-gardism” on

view at your nearest available expensive international festival. The exception to Savran's pessimism (really more a smart reading of how Bobos and budgeting make not such strange bedfellows) is the Wooster Group, whose 2004 piece, *Poor Theater*, pays tribute to and also exposes the datedness of the work of Grotowski, Max Ernst, and choreographer Bill Forsythe. Grotowski was all about presence while *Poor Theater* is all about simulacra, and Savran reads the piece as a work "that both sustains an avant-garde that no longer exists and mourns its death." Kermit Dunkelberg's "Confrontation, Simulation, Admiration: The Wooster Group's *Poor Theater*" (*TDR* 49, iii: 43–57) sees mockery and confrontation as well as admiration in the work. In mimicking videos of *Akropolis* the Wooster Group is acknowledging its place in avant-garde history but also staging their distance from a particular tradition that needs to be laid to rest.

Once upon a time the Provincetown Players were avant-garde, something Brenda Murphy unpacks in detail in *The Provincetown Players and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge). Murphy starts with the modest proposal that the initial two summer seasons (1915 and 1916) offered "a wide range of current realist aesthetics"; her project is to reveal the many ways that "current" could be portrayed dramaturgically. Provincetowners wrote for themselves and other like-minded liberals and feminists, but tolerance for stylistic experimentation varied. Murphy charts the differing, sometimes overlapping, often misunderstood (or multiply understood) terrains of Marxism, Nietzsche, psychoanalysis, and primitivism, to name just a few of the *-isms* that Provincetowners embraced in their quests for self-expression and cultural improvement. Most readers will readily recognize that synecdoche and metonymy, not symbolism, were the operative modes in the cultural critique of the early plays, which were, one way or another, realism of some sort. *Bound East for Cardiff*, George Cram Cook's *Change Your Style*, Wilbur Steele's *Contemporaries*, and Neith Boyce and Hutchins Hapgood's *Enemies* comprise a short list. Many of the plays critiqued some aspect of the bohemian culture they addressed. Murphy's star contribution, however, is the book's longest chapter, which deals with the abstract plays contributed by playwrights who both were othered by the central founding members of the group and also contributed to a short-lived magazine called *Others*. Edna St. Vincent Millay's *Aria da Capo* was not the only poetic, quasi-abstract, symbolic drama to emerge from the Provincetowners, although it may be one of the few with which they were comfortable. Alfred Kreyborg's

*Manikin and Minikin* anticipated *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. His *Jack's House: A Cubist Play* featured an expressionist set and Gertrude Stein-like dialogue. Max Bodenheim's *The Gentle Furniture-Shop* "offers a retail metaphor for the stages of life." The Players were neither monolithic nor a big happy family, and Murphy's fine study traces their differences in aesthetics and ideas about collaboration, showing how the race often went not to the artistically swiftest but to the one with the most internal political clout.

I conclude this chapter with a tip of my hat to Aoife Monks for an essay that could not have been written without formidable knowledge of a broad sweep of much of what I have reported on here. "'Genuine Negroes and Bloodhounds': Cross-Dressing, Eugene O'Neill, the Wooster Group, and *The Emperor Jones*" (*MD* 48: 540–64) troubles the legacies of both minstrelsy and O'Neill, usually understood as belonging in wholly separate categories (popular vs. literary being only one example). Monks positions the Wooster Group as heirs to the very problems O'Neill thought he was addressing in his play about "authentic" black identity. She thereby situates the Group as viable cultural critics, whether or not the avant-garde is dead. She also manages to include the role of technology in interpreting race—a sophisticated and essential lens in 21st-century scholarship. The Wooster Group's 1993 production of O'Neill's classic not only used blackface but got away with it for two reasons. First, the Group had defanged that snake with their highly controversial *Route 1&9* back in the 1980s, and second, Monks unflinchingly argues that nowadays, blackface is the only way to stage O'Neill's primitivist, outsider's view of race without totally offending. His exposure of the essence of blackness offended even the actor who originated the role of Brutus Jones in 1920, although to the minds of most whites involved, the fact that the actor, Charles Gilpin, was black, not blacked up, stood for "truth." Monks situates the Wooster Group's "appropriative strategies" firmly in the tradition of O'Neill's modernism and identifies their use of stylized blackface (only the face, not the limbs) with a kabuki costume for the woman playing Jones as a clear indictment of the playwright's own racism. O'Neill peeled off Jones's clothes to reveal what he imagined was an essence; the Wooster Group uses makeup, layered clothing, and cross-gender casting to show that when it comes to racial essentialism, there's no there there. Also, the use of video made it possible to change the color of the electronic images of the principal characters at will, suggesting how both "theatre and

television can be implicated within the creation of racial identity.” And just in case you think the critique ends there, Monks notes that deconstructive or not, the Wooster Group operated from a position of white privilege. Their highbrow work says nifty things about the construction of race, but it does little to alleviate (or even address) the ordinary racism experienced by real blacks. Finally, Monks notes that no audience member watching this piece could fail to be politicized (or implicated?) by the “inescapable tragedy” of cross-dressing. None of us who teach, edit, or read within the capacious category of “American drama” can fail to think intertextually. Monks writes that way, with as much panache as anyone whose work I have seen in a long time.

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