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Black Feminism in Contemporary Drama. By Lisa M. Anderson
Contemporary African American Women Playwrights: A Casebook.
Edited by Philip C. Kolin

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the BBC *Play of the Month* televised drama. Although many essays are persuasive studies of Miller's work performed and embraced in a global context, several read more like primary source material than scholarship. Others attempt to provide overviews of Miller's work as a whole in a country or city, but are unable to use specific enough case studies to explain why his work illuminates the national conversation. While disorienting at times, the variety of approaches parallels the overriding concern of the volume as a whole; it continually exposes Miller's work in a new light, situation, or location. Given the richness and range of the conversations, an index would have been especially useful for future scholars hoping to use this text to address one or two specific plays rather than a geographic location.

Particularly enjoyable are essays such as Antonio Celada's "The Reception of Miller's Theater in Spain" and Robert Gordon's "Guilty Secrets and Cultural Blind Spots: Miller's Plays in South Africa" that present multilayered discussions of the audience reactions and read into the cultural, political, and social impulses that resonate within these productions. Of note is Linda Ben-Zvi's "Arthur Miller's Israel and Israel's Arthur Miller," in which Ben-Zvi presents a compelling argument for Miller's standing in the Israeli theatre: "Israel is not alone in embracing Arthur Miller and his theater, but it is difficult to think of any other country—not America or even Britain—where his influence has been so pervasive for so long" (21). Israel, Ben-Zvi explains, replaced *Julius Caesar* with *All My Sons* as a recommended text for university-bound secondary school students in 1975; for many young Israelis, their first experience with theatre is *All My Sons*. In fact, Israel appears to use theatre—particularly Miller's work—as a way to not only imagine an ameliorated nation, but also as a catalyst for the establishment of that nation.

Overall, *Arthur Miller's Global Theater* provokes new questions and interpretations of a playwright that many link inextricably to the United States, encouraging a reexamination of Miller's relevance in a rapidly expanding global forum. The volume is a useful addition to theatre scholarship for not only Americanists and Miller scholars, but also for anyone interested in moving toward a global (re)consideration of a play, production, or playwright. The depth of discussion of Miller's plays beyond U.S. borders provides examples of cultural studies, postcolonial and reception theory, and the documentation of productions, and opens up a variety of worthwhile conversations in our complex social era.

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Black Feminism in Contemporary Drama. By Lisa M. Anderson. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008; pp. 152, 6 photographs. \$35 cloth.

Contemporary African American Women Playwrights: A Casebook. Edited by Philip C. Kolin. New York: Routledge, 2007; pp. 224. \$120 cloth.
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Reviewed by Adrienne C. Macki, University of Connecticut

Lisa M. Anderson's *Black Feminism in Contemporary Drama* and *Contemporary African American Women Playwrights*, a collection of critical essays edited by Philip C. Kolin, are welcome additions to the scholarship of African American theatre focusing on black female dramatists. These pioneering studies overlap only slightly in their treatment of three playwrights, but otherwise emerge as stalwart companions.

Anderson's book builds on Elizabeth Brown-Guillory's important studies, *Their Place on the Stage: Black Women Playwrights in America* (1988) and *Wines in the Wilderness: Plays by African American Women from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present* (1990) as well as Carol Allan's historical survey, *Peculiar Passages: Black Women Playwrights, 1875–2000* (2005). It also continues Anderson's own research in *Mammies No More* (1997), with its careful identification and exploration of a black feminist theatre aesthetic. She offers useful assessments of plays by Pearl Cleage, Breena Clarke, Glenda Dickerson, Kia Corthron, Shirlene Holmes, and Sharon Bridgforth utilizing Barbara Christian's approach of letting the work determine the theory by examining the intersectionality of "language, class, race, and gender" (3). This premise intends to bridge the divide between feminist theory, race theory, and dramatic criticism, offering a better way of understanding these contemporary black women playwrights. Anderson argues that their shared link may be described as a black feminist theatre aesthetic, which is determined by the "context in which a work is situated, how its construction and production are shaped, and how that shaping is informed by its politics" (2). Her book demonstrates how these representative dramatists share several similar strategies of resistance by reinventing and remembering black female identity. Anderson also defines how they challenge and revise cultural stereotypes, ultimately forming new representations that may be consistent or incongruent with "the goals of the 'community'" (3). Although she offers little discussion of whom and of what constitutes this community, overall Anderson provides a clear, accessible text that illuminates her subjects' concerns with constructing and reconstructing history, visibility and invisibility, racism, classicism, and sexism.

In Chapter 1, Anderson gives a sweeping historical context for black feminist aesthetics by tracing the origins of black feminist theatre back to the Harlem Renaissance and the trailblazing contributions of Georgia Douglas Johnson, Angelina Weld Grimké, Zora Neale Hurston, and others. Unified by their "exploration of black women's lives and the creation of a consciously black woman-identified art" (here Anderson is drawing on Barbara Smith's "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism"), these foremothers model the central tenets of black feminist aesthetics (12). Chapter 2 examines the plays of Pearl Cleage in terms of structure (as melodrama and well-made plays), use of history, and how they explicitly grapple with racism and sexism.

One of the book's most illuminating sections, Chapter 3, closely examines Breena Clarke and Glenda Dickerson's *Re/Membering Aunt Jemima: A Menstrual Show*. Its particularly rich discussion of the mammy icon and the Ashanti custom of *bo akutia*, a "vituperation by proxy," posits how the "play itself performs a kind of *bo akutia* of the minstrel show itself and of the society

that created the stereotypes the play seeks to deconstruct” (36). Anderson contends that the female interlocutor is both an aspect of the Aunt Jemima stereotype and an *orisa* of domesticity and safety. She asks from where does this icon emerge, and what is its effect? Likewise, her penetrating analysis of the play’s panoply of characters links them with their historical, literary, cultural, and mythological sources. Whether real or figurative, these female figures point to a forgotten history that is recovered in Clarke and Dickerson’s revisionist satirical work.

Chapter 4, perhaps the least successful, neglects the growing scholarship on prolific playwright Suzan-Lori Parks. The author emphasizes how Parks deconstructs and revises African American identity and iconicity, history and representation, by closely reading three of the dramatist’s earlier works. Fortunately, the book moves beyond this familiar territory to take up other contemporary playwrights, such as Kia Corthron in Chapter 5, and Shirlene Holmes and Sharon Bridgforth in Chapter 6, concentrating on their lesser-known texts. In this fascinating six chapter, “Signifying Black Lesbians: Dramatic Speculations,” Anderson invokes Julie Dash’s “speculative fiction” to reconstruct lesbian culture and community (95). I was left wanting more, wishing the author had delved further to investigate how sexual identities are signified, and how Holmes and Bridgforth reflected the construction of black queer communities as well as the connections among women within those communities.

Anderson’s conclusion outlines her vision of a black feminist aesthetic that links the ways these playwrights envision and revise history and identity and simultaneously reframe how black women are perceived (115). Though Anderson’s highly readable prose is sometimes hindered by plot summaries, those prove worthwhile in explicating less familiar works, which she parses in great detail. This is a significant contribution to the studies of gender, drama, and African American culture and literature.

Like Anderson’s book, *Contemporary African American Women Playwrights* contributes a robust sequel to a previous study: Carol Marsh-Lockett’s *Black Women Playwrights: Visions on the American Stage* (1998). Kolin’s casebook of critical essays by many of the field’s leading scholars serves as a worthy introduction to several major black women dramatists. Comprising the editor’s introduction, eleven essays, and an interview, it deftly weaves historical, literary, and theoretical approaches to familiarize scholars and students with the works of Alice Childress, Sonia Sanchez, Adrienne Kennedy, Ntozake Shange, Pearl Cleage, Aishah Rahman, Glenda Dickerson, Anna Deavere Smith, Suzan-Lori Parks, and Lynn Nottage.

Arranged somewhat chronologically, the book endeavors to map the “evolutionary history” of these black female playwrights and their impact on American theatre (2). David Krasner’s lucid essay begins the collection and supplies a reflective context to help situate these contemporary writers alongside their artistic predecessors, from Zora Neale Hurston in the Harlem Renaissance to Lorraine Hansberry in the 1950s. The collection ends with an insightful interview with Lynn Nottage conducted by Sandra Shannon. What emerges in between is how these playwrights are linked not only thematically but also politically and

dramaturgically—deftly weaving a rich tapestry of activism, text, and performance. All of the featured playwrights are concerned with gender and racial politics, and most of the women in the collection have utilized experimental forms.

Although a majority of the essays are useful to a variety of readers, the most successful offer clear examples to demonstrate their theoretical underpinnings. For instance, Jacqueline Wood provides an engaging analysis of Sonia Sanchez's often neglected radical protest dramas. As Wood makes clear, repetition, wordplay, and signification were key devices employed by Sanchez. The author points to Sanchez's place in the Black Arts movement and her "radicalization of dramatic form (fractured characterizations, transgressions of traditional structure, and innovative use of language)" (50). Similarly, Joan Wylie Hall's discussion of Anne Deavere Smith's use of identity, polyvocal dialogue, and "border-crossings" (161) is nuanced and rewarding.

One of the book's most compelling contributions is editor Philip C. Kolin's elegantly written chapter on Adrienne Kennedy, which clearly benefits from his previous monograph closely studying the playwright's nightmarish visions of identity, race, and history. Especially interesting is his thoughtful reading of a 2006 revival of *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, directed by Billie Allen at the Classical Theatre of Harlem.

Also noteworthy is Brandi Wilkins Catanese's engaging investigation of Aishah Rahman's recovery of black icons such as Charlie Parker, Billie Holiday, and Zora Neale Hurston as an antidote to the commodification of black culture. She situates Rahman within an African cultural diaspora and notes her invocation of European traditions and Western mythology. But what are we to make of the playwright's intraracial epistemologies? Further exploration of this provocative fusion would better serve the author's purpose.

Whereas Anderson's treatment of Suzan-Lori Parks often covers familiar ground, in "Digging the Fo'-fathers," Debby Thompson adds to the postcolonial discussion of the playwright, linking her dramatic oeuvre to Michel Foucault's archaeological and genealogical imperatives. Tightly focusing on Parks's "digging aesthetic" (169) as a way to read all of the playwright's works, Thompson claims that "Parks's plays do to race in America what Foucault's *History of Sexuality* did to sexuality: it 'dis(-re-)members' the ruptured strands of discourse that produced contemporary knowable identities" (172). She concludes that "Parks's plays perform an archeology of race, digging through layers of sediment" (174).

Sandra Shannon's essay on Lynn Nottage, the volume's penultimate piece, highlights consistent themes that easily could describe most of the playwrights in the collection, such as providing a voice to silenced figures from history, especially women. Similarly, as Shannon points out, Nottage is the self-appointed "custodian of her family's history" (186), which is a wonderful metaphor for the work of these playwrights; indeed, the same could be said of Alice Childress, Pearl Cleage, Aishah Rahman, and Glenda Dickerson—as Soyica Diggs, Beth Turner, Brandi Wilkins Catanese, and Freda Scott Giles demonstrate in their respective essays.

Admittedly, some of the essays are stronger than others. The weakest stretch the intellectual arguments too thin in favor of covering too many plays or offering lengthy biographical summaries. There are a few typographical errors—"Cantanese" for "Catanese" (5)—and read together, the essays sometimes present repetitive contextualization of the playwrights. Yet overall, the book is enormously valuable for its range of playwrights (who have yet to receive sufficient critical attention) rather than its uniform depth of analysis. With its focus on texts and intertextuality, the contributors maintain a blend of criticism, cultural history, and theatre history.



Dancing Communities: Performance, Difference and Connection in the Global City. By Judith Hamera. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007; pp. 238. \$79.95 cloth.

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In her detailed book *Dancing Communities: Performance, Difference and Connection in the Global City* analyzing dance as a laboratory of technique, Judith Hamera leads us to a new understanding of bodily practice and the creation of community. As she proposes, this formation of community through a unique relationship between the use of space and the mastered technique has become one of the marks of new alliances in the global city. Within this innovative understanding of community, dance offers more than simply a "politics of propinquity" (1), reshaping potential intimacy through these "laboratories" in which gender, race, sexuality, class, and urban life are confronted.

In a series of five chapters, Hamera examines techniques in a variety of different spatial environments in and around Los Angeles, including outlying communities such as Pasadena and Long Beach, which is home to many Cambodian immigrants and refugees as well as studios, classrooms, and dance companies. The diverse bodily practices observed include ballet, *butoh*, Khmer classical dance, Pilates training, and modern–postmodern fusion. In Chapter 1, "Intimacies in Motion," Hamera asserts that dance amateurs or professionals create their own communities within the global city of Los Angeles through common daily practices. The visibility of shared methods or movements among practitioners and their consumption by others is established as a basis for the creation of dancing communities. Yet it is worth pointing out that technique cannot be separated or produced in complete isolation from its surroundings, including the sociopolitical context of practitioners, imaginations of national identity, and the fluid concepts of ownership of dance practices, framed by the multiculturalism of the global city.

In Chapter 2, "Corporeal Chronotopes: Making Place and Keeping Time in Ballet," Hamera sees the construction of social landscape as gendered (66), offering a safe space for exposure, competition, and cooperation. Through the