

with women inmates in the UK and Brazil, is a beautiful piece that combines lyrical, evocative writing with detailed explanations of drama exercises. The exercise “Doing the Laundry” demonstrates the intense creativity, joy, and activism of the project:

Laundry is one of the most hopeful things in the prison yard. It is a constant rhythm, a dependable display of individuality, a message sent when things can be seen but not heard. For us, it became a canvas, a costume and a political banner and hanging laundry in public became our method of declaring our human rights. (61)

Through theatre, the prison women, artists, and spectators were taken to a place of truth.

Because of stories such as these, and they are numerous and recent, *The Applied Theatre Reader* is a testament to the astounding ongoing international phenomenon of applied theatre as a means of communication, change, and cultural engagement.

MARC MAUFORT and CAROLINE DE WAGTER, eds.
Signatures of the Past: Cultural Memory in Contemporary Anglophone North American Drama
Bruxelles, Bern, Berlin, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Oxford, Wein: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2008. 314 pp.

ANNE NOTHOF

Originating in a conference at the Université Libre de Bruxelles in 2007, this inclusive collection of critical essays on postmodern and postcolonial Canadian and American drama in English provides a detailed consideration of “cultural memory.” In his Introduction, Marc Maufort acknowledges both the “genetic and generic affinity between the dramatic production of the two countries” (11) and the difference and divergence in respect to “diasporic identities, exilic predicaments, and multi-ethnic subject positions” (11-12), leaving the field wide open for the following twenty essays. Although he offers the proviso “that the notion of ‘cultural memory’ is not only an attribute of ethnic difference” (14), most of the essays focus on “minority” cultures in both countries, placed in opposition to an assumed homogeneous “white” majority. In this collection, the recurrent motif of

“interculturalism” is positioned both positively and negatively: the Canadian essays construct interculturalism as conciliatory, whereas the Latina (American) essays view it as a form of cultural genocide.

Only a few of the essays undertake useful cross-border comparisons which identify difference and similarity in terms of cultural memory. Craig Walker’s opening piece, “‘Hopeful Memories and Doomed Freaks.’ Evolutionary Overtones in Canadian and American Drama,” draws on the enviro-nics research of Michael Adams in *Fire and Ice* (2003) to launch a provocative analysis of four Canadian performances which embody patterns of hope and fulfillment, and six American plays which enact harsher Darwinian principles with respect to survival in terms of their monstrous protagonists. Other critical border crossings, however, occlude historical differences, as is the case in Jacqueline Petropoulos’s “‘The Ground on Which I Stand.’ Rewriting History, African Canadian Style,” which interprets Djanet Sears’s *Adventures of a Black Girl in Search of God* and *Harlem Duet* in terms of “drawing on African American culture as part of the larger project of rewriting and reclaiming blackness in an African Canadian and diasporic context” (80). Harry J. Elam’s “Remembering Africa, Performing Cultural Memory” more convincingly places Djanet Sears in an American context, in a comparison with Lorraine Hansberry and Suzan-Lori Parks, implicitly demonstrating Sears’s acknowledged debt to Hansberry. Although these “acclaimed women playwrights” (32) differ in many respects, their plays position cultural memory “in service of identity construction and racial repositioning in the present” (32). His essay, like many in the collection, is informed by Diana Taylor’s *The Archive and the Repertoire* and Paul Connerton’s *How Societies Remember*, which insist on the performativity of cultural memory.

Ric Knowles elaborates on Taylor’s thesis in “Performing Intercultural Memory in the Diasporic Present. The Case of Toronto.” He begins with the questionable categorical assertion that “[a]ll memory bridges difference” (49), and then clearly establishes his terminology, distinguishing “interculturalism” from Canada’s much vaunted policy of “multiculturalism,” which he believes “commodif[ies] or exoticiz[es] difference” (49) and which constructs memory as nostalgic. He effectively mines Toronto’s “complex intercultural performance ecologies” (49) for his diverse case studies, which “move from the individual effort to suture a divided cultural identity to the communal building of

shared cultural memory, to the actual *constitution* of new forms of community through ‘prosthetic’ memory-making” (52): *Fish Eyes* by South Asian Canadian Anita Majumbar, *Singkil* by Filipina Canadian Catherine Hernandez, *The Sheep and the Whale* by Moroccan Canadian Ahmed Ghazali, and *The Scrubbing Project* by the Turtle Gals Performance Ensemble. Knowles skilfully negotiates a fraught terrain with his positive reading of imagined memory as transformative, but blurs the distinction between “remembering” and “imagining.”

In her intricate analysis of Carl Hancock Rux’s obscure work, *Talk*, Michelle Elam makes the important point that memory is unreliable: “fragmented, self-interested memories only *produce the person remembering*” (88), citing Diana Taylor’s theory that those of mixed race are always “a product of cultural memory, [the] body [. . .] mapped by racialized and gendered practices of individual and collective identity” (92). From a more political perspective, Jerry Wasserman and Guillermo Verdecchia underscore the revisionist nature of memory, particularly when placed in the service of the construction of a national mythology. In “Remembering Agraba: Canadian Political Theatre and the Construction of Cultural Memory,” Wasserman analyzes Sharon Pollock’s *Walsh*, Tim Carlson’s *Diplomacy*, and Verdecchia’s *The Adventures of Ali & Ali and the aXes of Evil* to demonstrate how cultural memory is “evoked in the name of a particular ideology” (112). In “Contending with Rupture: Memory-work in Latina-Canadian Playwriting,” Argentinian Canadian playwright Guillermo Verdecchia focuses on three little-known Latin American Canadian plays which actively reconstruct cultural memories of past political traumas in Columbia, Chile, Argentina, Guatemala, and Mexico in response to the demands of the present, demonstrating the shaky continuity between past and present experience.

The next four essays continue the exploration of traumatic cultural memory in American Latino/a plays. In “*La Tierra, Nuestra Madre*,” Phil Howard compares the plays of Milcah Sanchez-Scott, Cherrie Moraga, and Luis Alfaro in terms of the ways in which their female protagonists transcend their liminal identities through a recognition of and return to their own land. In “Impossible Patriots,” Micaela Díaz-Sánchez draws on feminist and queer theory to explicate Moraga’s *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* in terms of imagining a homeland for Chicana revolutionaries dispossessed by US imperialism. “Nostalgia” assumes positive connotations as a “generative sociopolitical

practice" (149). Moraga's own article, "Indígena as Scribe: The (W)rite to Remember," is an account of her life as a writer, beginning with a dream vision of the "Old Way," and imagining the Aztec Empire as an exemplary civilization and her ancestral home. She accuses the American government of genocide and challenges the indicators of hybridization, such as "mestisaje" [*sic*] culture, which "reflect another attempt by the Corporate Academy [...] to exploit the rhetoric of democratic multiculturalism and pluralism at home to engage our support and services for transnational profit abroad" (161). For Moraga, interculturalism has no place in Aztlán, and her combative position is reinforced by "*Cositas Quebradas: Performance Codex*," a hybrid interview/biographical narrative/performance piece by Celia Herrera Rodriguez who re-members the dispossession and diaspora of her pre-conquest Mexican nation through ritual enactment. On the other hand, Sammie Choy provides a more hopeful account of the reconstruction of Hawaiian indigenous cultural memory and postcolonial self-definition in *The Bones Live* by Victoria Nalani Kneubuhl.

The non-Native Canadian critics focus on healing and redemption in their consideration of indigenous plays. Mary Blackstone examines the roles played by the ghosts of cultural memory in four Cree plays by Tomson Highway, Daniel David Moses, and Damon Badger Heit. She posits a definition of memory from the perspective of First Nations as "a liminal site in which past, present, and future intersect in the ongoing negotiation of meaning and identity" (180), finding in the communities of Highway's *Rez Sisters* and *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* a positive hybridization, despite the cultural trauma. Moses's ghost in *Almighty Voice and his Wife* functions as a metaphor for cultural memory, whereas in *Broken Bones*, Heit "challenges assumptions in the earlier plays about a collective, intergroup memory accessible to all First Nations people" (193). Like the protagonist in Drew Haydon Taylor's *alterNatives*, Heit's urban Native, Prior, while acknowledging "his connection with the ghosts of the cultural past," "asserts his right to create [...] his own stories with an independent cultural voice here and now" (194). Sheila Rabillard sees in Marie Clements's *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* the process of making memories in order to re-configure the traumatic history of violence against urban Native women as a socially redemptive project. In "Historically-Based Theatre in a Canadian Small City," Ginny Ratsoy convincingly demonstrates how three plays construct a revisionist

identity for Kamloops, British Columbia by “problematiz[ing] dominant cultural memory” (232).

The cultural memories of Canada’s majority “white” population, and the response of foreign audiences to the Canadian identity they perform are interrogated in “Suddenly, Canada is hot” by Birgit Shreyer Duarte, and “Memories, Hauntings and Exorcisms in Brad Fraser’s *Snake in Fridge*” by Roberta Mock. Duarte poses the important question of “how [. . .] the role of cultural memory in the reception of art get[s] modified when the memory lacks resonance in the foreign culture” (262) in her consideration of the German reception of Michael Healey’s well-travelled memory play *The Drawer Boy*. Mock focuses on the cultural significance of ghosts in Brad Fraser’s *Snake in Fridge*, which exposes the violence that lurks beneath the surface in multicultural Toronto. Mock considers Fraser’s plays as “transcending Canadian cultural discourse, either through their use of transnational strategies bound to gay identity positions or their reflection of globalized lifestyles” (241). In her essay on the globalization of *The Vagina Monologues*, Susan Kattwinkel deconstructs attempts at cultural inclusivity in performances that “fail [. . .] to ‘criticize the American multicultural dream,’ instead positing a dream of international feminism, defined by American politically correct values” (250). In effect, she challenges the project of interculturalism in her contention that “[t]he more inclusive an artifact desires to be, the more performative cultural memory contests itself, disputing not only the culture, but the nature of memory” (249). Conversely, Karen Shimakawa’s essay on Asian American productions asks whether in the performance of “difference,” can an audience be both discomfited and entertained without recourse to humanist identification and universalization?

In the penultimate essay, the co-editor of *Signatures of the Past*, Caroline De Wagter, refocuses the collection on “cultural memory” and “North American drama” through an insightful comparison of Singaporean American and Korean Canadian plays, asserting the importance of identifying specific origins, and resisting a holistic interpretation of “Asian” or “American.” She acknowledges that the works of Chay Yew and M.J. Kang “resort to acts of dramatic imagination in an attempt to re-configure the complexity of cultural memory” (274). And also, like Ric Knowles, she asserts that the performance of cultural hybridity may be transformative and healing—“one that acknowledges contradictions, honors differences, and celebrates commonalities” (288).

Signatures of Our Past constitutes a rich and comprehensive collection, demonstrating the differences and similarities between Canada and the United States in the dramatic creation and critical reception of cultural memory as a continuation of colonization, or a post-colonial enfranchisement.

CANDIDA RIFKIND

Comrades and Critics: Women, Literature, & the Left in 1930s Canada

Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2009. viii + 268 pp.

SUSAN KNUTSON

Recipient of the Ann Saddlemyer scholarly book award at the 2010 conference of the CATR/ACRT, Candida Rifkind's *Comrades and Critics* expands the vital field of scholarship that is rewriting our knowledge and our analyses of left-wing Canadian modernism. In the 1930s, Canadian women writers and cultural workers including Dorothy Livesay, Ruby Ronan, Anne Marriott, Irene Baird, Toby Gordon Ryan, Mildred Goldberg, Elsie Park Gowan, Minnie Evans Bicknell, Mary Reynolds, and Jim (Jean) Watts made crucial contributions to English-Canadian communist and social democratic journalism, poetry, fiction, and theatre. Rifkind surveys this work in historical context and addresses its place in national cultural memory and its reception in English-Canadian literary history.

An introductory chapter on the "Socialist-Modernist Encounter" points to the "double duty of the English-Canadian literary left, to give creative expression to socialism and overturn the dominant literary tradition" (4), and goes on to frame the book's most original insights, which have to do with the gendered terms of the Socialist-Modernist encounter and its impact on the period's women artists and on their work. I would say, in my second-wave sort of way, that this book exposes the pervasive sexism of the most progressive discourses of English Canada in the 1930s. As Rifkind explains, the problem was not only that gender issues were explicitly subordinated to class and other struggles during the Comintern period, and then subordinated again in relation to the fight against fascism during the period of the Popular Front, although this did happen and it needs to be