

COMPTE RENDUS / BOOK REVIEWS

MAUREEN MOYNAGH, ed.

African-Canadian Theatre.

Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English. Vol. 2.
Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2005. xxii + 130pp.

SUSAN BENNETT, ed.

Feminist Theatre and Performance.

Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English. Vol. 4.
Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2005. xvii + 161pp.

NAILA KELETA-MAE

Certainly one of the challenges of creating an ambitious and necessary series like *Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English* would be to determine the title of each volume and thus the ways in which readers are encouraged to engage with and draw connections to the material. Maureen Moynagh's and Susan Bennett's edited volumes provide important insights into three critical areas of inquiry in Canadian theatre and performance studies: African-Canadian theatre, feminist theatre, and feminist performance. When read together, Moynagh's and Bennett's volumes are also rife with intriguing points of intersection that problematize, in refreshing ways, the parameters set by their respective volume titles. *African-Canadian Theatre* and *Feminist Theatre and Performance* both include analyses of the implications for scholars, critics, and artists who, among other commonalities, work in historically under-examined fields of inquiry and stage subjects and subject matters that affirm and destabilize dominant notions of the Canadian nation-state. Informatively, both Moynagh's and Bennett's volumes also include an array of approaches for how scholars, critics, and artists subvert and engage these difficult realities. What emerges in these lucid volumes is a survey of complex theatrical practices, practitioners, subject matters, and, especially in the case of Bennett's volume, methodology. Organized chronologically, *African-Canadian Theatre* and *Feminist Theatre and Performance* suggest historical trajectories and gesture towards a canon. However, with varying degrees of emphasis Moynagh and Bennett resist categorizing their respective volumes as authoritative accounts, and instead both editors highlight the importance of continued research and writing to the expansion of their respective fields.

In her introduction, Moynagh enters into a necessarily nuanced discussion about the complicated ways in which dominant discourse in Canada collapses the historical, political, and cultural contexts of blackness in Canada with those of blackness in the United States of America. Moynagh's introduction thoughtfully identifies intersections between race/ethnicity and nation as key sites of contemplation and contestation in the work of African-Canadian theatre artists, critics, and scholars. The analysis of these intersections is subsequently expounded upon in divergent ways in George Elliott Clarke's "Must All Blackness Be American? Locating Canada in Borden's *Tightrope Time* or Nationalizing Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*," Andrea Davis's "Sex and the Nation: Performing Black Female Sexuality in Canadian Theatre,"¹ Alan Filewod's "'From Twisted History': Reading *Angélique*," and Rinaldo Walcott's "Dramatic Instabilities: Diasporic Aesthetics as a Question for and about Nation." The conundrum of black positionality in Canada vis à vis the influence of the United States of America also plays itself out in the volume's Suggested Further Reading list's subheading of Secondary Materials on Theatre and Drama, where numerous titles reference African-American theatre. Other subheadings in Moynagh's Suggested Further Reading list, however, feature Canadian sources that provide a comprehensive resource that would serve as a useful guide for researchers of African-Canadian theatre (and/or literary production)—particularly if considered in conjunction with Robin Breon's landmark text that is reprinted in the volume, "The Growth and Development of Black Theatre in Canada: A Starting Point."

In her introduction, Bennett productively surveys publications on feminist theatre and performance in Canada, concludes that her volume is the first to compile this feminist research in one place, and queries the conditions that permitted the absence of a similarly comprehensive text in Canada for so long. In addition, Bennett highlights the influence of Rina Fraticelli's landmark 1982 report, commissioned by the federal government, *The Status of Women in Canadian Theatre*. According to Bennett, the report affirmed female practitioners' assessment that they were chronically under-represented and spurred critics and scholars to research and write about feminist theatre. Perhaps informed by her work on the Board of Directors of Maenad Theatre in Calgary, Bennett's introduction importantly emphasizes not only produced feminist work, but also feminist process. This focus on methodology is most clearly actualized in Wendy Philpott's "Women's Circle, Women's Theatre," Djanet Sears's "Naming Names: Black Women Playwrights in Canada," and Donna E. Smyth's "Getting the Message: The NAAGs of Halifax."

Philpott's chapter brings interviews with theatre practitioners into a cohesive conversation uninterrupted by the voices of scholars or critics, while Sears's chapter almost reads like a scene from a play, and Smyth's chapter strikes autoethnographic tones with its underpinnings of critical self-reflexivity. Bennett's investment in making process visible is also apparent in the contested history of the founding of Nightwood Theatre that plays out on the pages of the volume—most notably in Cynthia Grant's "Still 'Activist' After All the Years? Reflections on Feminist Theatre, Then and Now," which includes a note from the editor indicating that Kim Renders refutes Grant's Nightwood Theatre origin story. The volume concludes with a useful Suggested Further Reading list featuring numerous titles about Canadian feminist theatre and performance practices.

In Ric Knowles's "General Editor Preface," he expresses his aspirations for the series, which include that the volumes, and other complementary publications, encourage new courses on Canadian drama and that the topics covered "serve as a corrective" to Canadian theatre research traditions' "historical exclusions" (iv) of various communities of artists. Certainly Moynagh's *African-Canadian Theatre* and Bennett's *Feminist Theatre and Performance* thoughtfully articulate and highlight the histories of their respective fields in ways that make key artists, theories, and methodologies accessible for interested students and educators. To that end, either book could anchor a required reading list in a course about African-Canadian theatre, feminist theatre, or feminist performance. Appearing as required reading on course lists together, however, Moynagh and Bennett's books could also open up areas of inquiry that could challenge students and educators in ways that would not only correct historical processes of omission but also, reshape the present.

RANDALL MARTIN and KATHERINE SCHEIL, eds.
Shakespeare/Adaptation/Modern Drama: Essays in Honour of Jill L. Levenson.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011. xiii + 329 pp., 4 illustrations.

SARA BOLAND-TAYLOR

In *Shakespeare/Adaptation/Modern Drama: Essays in Honour of Jill L. Levenson*, the editors bring together fifteen scholars whose work is possible because of Levenson's ground-breaking studies in the three title topics. Defending the seemingly arbitrary combination