

women to break free from the Madonna–whore syndrome patriarchal society imposes upon them.

Regrettably, the book offers no perspectives on the production and reception of Williams’s plays outside of the United States. Starting in the mid-1940s, shrewd agents and producers aggressively promoted him as a playwright with a mass appeal, not least to western European audiences. In the twenty-first century, this appeal has become global with innovative productions and postmodern adaptations in Germany, Russia, Canada, Uruguay, and Australia. Taking these international achievements into consideration would not only allow the reader a more comprehensive view of Williams’s impact, but also do justice to Williams as a truly global playwright. In spite of this shortcoming, *The Theatre of Tennessee Williams* provides a solid introduction to the dramatic work of Williams for students and a general audience wishing to learn more about the plays and their cultural context.

• • •

Contemporary Women Playwrights: Into the Twenty-First Century. Edited by Penny Farfan and Lesley Ferris. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013; pp. xv + 306. \$105 cloth, \$33 paper.

doi:10.1017/S004055741500068X

Reviewed by Kim Solga, *University of Western Ontario*

Penny Farfan and Lesley Ferris’s 2013 collection, *Contemporary Women Playwrights: Into the Twenty-First Century*, is a hard-working book that includes an admirably diverse cross section of essays on theatre women writing worldwide. It will be especially valuable to students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, as the essays are accessibly written, and each places an emphasis on describing as well as analyzing several representative texts. Although specialist scholars in the area may at times be disappointed by the workmanlike nature of many of the chapters, they will nevertheless learn a great deal about trends in contemporary women’s theatre outside their specific geographical zones of interest. Helpfully, given the reference-book qualities of this volume, Palgrave has brought it out in paperback at an excellent price, making it an ideal choice for university reading lists.

Contemporary Women Playwrights is divided into three parts: “Histories,” “Conflicts,” and “Genres.” At times this division seems arbitrary—for example, two essays that focus on history appear in “Genres,” while many of the essays in the “History” section seem to fall just as easily into other categories—but this does the book no harm. The volume flows well geographically, moving fluidly from North and South America to Egypt, Israel, Oceania, and beyond; it is this geographical and cultural diversity that I consider the book’s primary strength, especially at a time when feminist performance scholars are making a deliberate attempt to think more internationally and interculturally.

The book opens and closes with strong, forcefully feminist, theoretically rigorous essays on Anglophone performance: Elaine Aston’s award-winning

“Feeling the Loss of Feminism: Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* and an Experiential Genealogy of Contemporary Women’s Playwriting,” first published in *Theatre Journal* in 2010, and Elin Diamond’s “Deb Margolin, Robbie McCauley, Peggy Shaw: Affect and Performance,” an outstanding chapter that offers one of the most cogent assessments I have ever read of the value of affect theory for feminist performance. The level of rigor in these papers is exceptional, in more than one sense: several of the other chapters read as perfunctory in comparison with Aston’s and Diamond’s lively and committed writing. This is not so much a criticism, however, as it is indicative of the purpose of the volume as a whole: to introduce readers to works they would not otherwise encounter, and in a manner thorough enough to prompt readers to seek out the works and artists under discussion.

Several of the essays are primarily descriptive, offering summaries of the most important work being written and staged in their regions: Ana Elena Puga’s “Female Alliances and Women’s Histories in Contemporary Mexican and Argentine Drama,” Nehad Selaiha and Sarah Enany’s “Women Playwrights in Egypt,” Yvette Hutchison’s “Women Playwrights in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” and Diana Looser’s essay on contemporary indigenous performance in the South Pacific islands are all representative of this approach. Other chapters include an element of regional reporting while also utilizing theoretical, historical, or cultural materialist frameworks that situate their chosen artists within broader, contemporary theatre and performance studies concerns. Here, essays by Natalie Alvarez (on Latina performance and transculturalism), Sara Warner (on contemporary lesbian performance, immaterial labor, affect, and “chronic” activism), Sharon Friedman (on contemporary war plays by women), Wendy Arons and Theresa J. May (on women’s labor in ecodramaturgy), and Katharine E. Kelly (on convergences between the feminist history play and feminist historiography between 1976 and 2010) are all well worth a read, not only for the broad information they provide but also for the sophisticated analyses they offer. Some contributions, by comparison, feel strangely idiosyncratic: Lesley Ferris and Melissa Lee’s chapter on the figure of the actress in three history plays is fascinating but struck me as slightly wedged into consonance with the volume’s broader focus on women’s history and cultural difference. Similarly, Soyica Diggs Colbert’s chapter on Katori Hall’s *The Mountaintop* offers a superb analysis of this play in relation to the broader cultural representation of the life of Martin Luther King Jr., but it is highly specific in its focus compared to the majority of the book’s chapters. Essays such as these offer useful structural diversity, to be sure, but may not be as easily transportable into the classroom as some of the others.

Contemporary Women Playwrights: Into the Twenty-First Century grew out of two earlier endeavors: the working session on Contemporary Women Playwrights at the 2009 ASTR conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and a special issue of *Theatre Journal* (62.4, 2010) on contemporary women’s playwriting, both convened and edited by Farfan and Ferris. Though I found it somewhat troubling, at first, to see how many of the essays in this book were previously published (six), there is no doubt that the volume grows out of Farfan and Ferris’s sustained,

careful commitment to this subject, and that the result will be of tremendous value to both students and scholars of women's theatre and performance for years to come.

• • •

A Race So Different: Performance and Law in Asian America. By Joshua Takano Chambers-Letson. New York and London: NYU Press, 2013; pp. xiii + 266, 30 illustrations. \$85 cloth, \$26 paper, \$22.10 e-book.

doi:10.1017/S0040557415000691

Reviewed by Eng-Beng Lim, *Dartmouth College*

In Joshua Chambers-Letson's award-winning book, *A Race So Different: Performance and Law in Asian America*, "the law's realization is inextricable from the performance of law" (2). This performative dictum and the juridical scenario of the United States versus Asian Americans are fundamental for understanding the regulation of US racial exception and Asian American subjectivity in the long twentieth century. Chambers-Letson argues that the terms of (mis)recognition and (de)legitimation of Asian American rights and identities, whether found in legal or popular cultural encounters, are at once reiterable and changeable through a dialectic of "social structure and cultural representation" (4, quoting Omi and Winant). However, maintaining the assumptions of this dialectic as opposing forces is ultimately untenable, since the law and performance aesthetics bleed into each other. Reading the book with this setup in mind tests the limits of causation between law or performance and its specific effects or enactments. It points to the complex coconstitution of the law, a form of "embodied art," and actual performance and theatre, which serve simultaneously as the law's agents and critics (19). One way to think about this paradox is through the function of performance as the law's aesthetic proxy (turning "legal performatives into embodied realities" [14]) and disruptive force ("the body disrupts the interpellative trajectory of the law in order to posit and present other alternatives" [14]).

As a result of Chambers-Letson's masterful staging, the law is not pitted against aesthetics or vice versa. Instead, the book brings the two together as fungible entities in the history of Asian American racialization. In so doing, it yields some startling insights about how the slippages of this complex give way to what Chambers-Letson describes (citing Shoshana Felman's term for art) as "the language of infinity" (22; vs. law, which Felman calls "a language of abbreviation"), while enabling new treatments of racial injustice. Tellingly, the book's organization narrates the juridical architecture of Asian difference up front only to have it evidently disappear into everyday life. Much of the historical and theoretical overview is found in the superb introduction, which would be of interest to anyone exploring the intersection of law, performance, and racial performativity; it provides a persuasive gambit, an opening statement in court. To extend the metaphor, each subsequent chapter begins with a legal case history that haunts the reading of Asian American cultural productions, objects, and texts. These cases are selected