

Cole meticulously fulfills her stated aim to engage in “scholarship that honors the complexity of the interpretive process; scholarship that looks for truths embedded in testimony that run counter to the commission’s mandate; interpretations that shelve the interminable assessment of the commission’s virtues or faults; books and articles that actually quote testimony” (90). She demonstrates her strengths as an outsider-insider, as both an American scholar who has thoroughly researched her subject in great depth and breadth, and as a performance studies academic who has immersed herself in the history, sociology, arts, and performance events of this momentous space and time of transition in South Africa. This invaluable book must be read and deserves its place in libraries and on personal bookshelves.

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*Suzan-Lori Parks: Essays on the Plays and Other Works*. Edited by Philip C. Kolin. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010; pp. 219. \$39.95 paper.

doi:10.1017/S0040557411000871

Reviewed by James M. Cherry, Wabash College

In the past two decades, the plays of Suzan-Lori Parks have become a central part of the American dramatic canon, yet the range and diversity of Parks’s written work extends beyond the theatre, offering a rich and expanding terrain for analysis. *Suzan-Lori Parks: Essays on the Plays and Other Works*, edited by Philip C. Kolin, considers Parks in her multiplicity not only as a prolific playwright, but also as a writer of screenplays, essays, and novels, as a musician, as a philosopher, and as a spiritual being.

The story of Suzan-Lori Parks is well known to followers of contemporary American theatre. Her life as a playwright began at Mount Holyoke College under the tutelage of James Baldwin, and formal experiments followed in early works such as *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World* (1990). Her first mainstream successes came with *The America Play* (1994) and her reinterpretations of Hawthorne in the “Red Letter” plays (1999–2000); she then became the first African American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize, with *Topdog/Underdog* (2001). Her *365 Plays/365 Days* project (2006) united more than seven hundred theatres in global collaboration. Her ventures outside drama are also notable: forays into screenwriting in the form of *Girl 6* (1996) and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (2005), essays such as “Elements of Style” (1995), and the novel *Getting Mother’s Body* (2003). Like few playwrights of her generation, Suzan-Lori Parks has crossed over from the edges of the avant-garde to Broadway. She has worked, and continues to work, in multiple genres, achieving both critical and mainstream success while vigorously breaking new ground.

Kolin’s holistic approach to Parks offers the reader insights into an artist who is notable for her ability to slip between and among genres and modes. This collection offers a diverse array of voices speaking to Parks’s total body of

work, and the essayists are clearly well versed in, and indebted to, the most recent scholarship on Parks, particularly Deborah Geis's *Suzan-Lori Parks* (U. Michigan, 2008) and *Suzan-Lori Parks: A Casebook*, edited by Kevin J. Wetmore and Alycia Smith Howard (Routledge, 2007). Kolin's anthology is an undertaking of celebration and investigation, and while its contributors demonstrate passion for their subject (there are moments that brush up against hagiography), it contains as many insights into Suzan-Lori Parks as an artist as it does tributes to her vast, diverse, and complex body of work.

Essays by Kolin and Rena Fraden introduce the text, together offering a framework for the largely chronological treatment that follows. Kolin's piece analyzes the metatheatrics of Parks's dramaturgy, showing how Parks deploys "racialized spectacles" (15) to trouble the spectator's preconceived notions of race and gender. Fraden's essay is particularly sharp, delving into the spiritual nature of Parks's fundamental notion of "radical inclusion." As Fraden suggests, the people who populate Parks's plays are "embedded in a matrix of other traditions and histories and spirits" (32). Parks's belief in inclusiveness, as well as her openness to difference, allow her to tap into the work of the "Great Authors" and to cross canonical and chronological divides—to visit, as Fraden puts it, "[a]ncestors, who ought to be honored, enjoyed, digested, *used*" (29). This sense of Parks as a writer fascinated by the project of interpreting and reframing our collective past pervades the volume.

Following Kolin's and Fraden's introductory essays, Jacqueline Wood examines the connections between jazz and Parks's "Rep & Rev" (repetition and revision) techniques in lesser-known of her early works such as *Betting on the Dust Commander*. For Wood, these strategies "challeng[e] monolithic notions of language as a science and as a regulatory system accepted as capable of rendering the experiences of the marginalized, in this case African American women" (42). Woods notes in these early plays the ways in which Parks's "jazzing" of language allows space for new narratives and ideologies to be spoken and heard. Elsewhere in the volume, Shawn-Marie Garrett examines the controversy over the world-premiere production of Parks's *Venus* (1996), which brought Parks and director Richard Foreman into conflict over his interpretation of Parks's text. Garrett suggests that Forman's Brechtian sensibilities voided Parks's attempt to generate audience empathy with the title character.

Christine Woodworth examines the role of children—who are often marked by the physical absence of parents and by cycles of poverty and oppression—in Parks's plays. Considering such texts as *Topdog/Underdog* and the "Red Letter" plays, Woodworth writes that childhood in Parks often "underscores the cyclical, and traumatic, life of families and, by extension, history" (154). The cyclical is structurally affirmed via *365 Days/365 Plays*, and Jennifer Larson looks to that play cycle as a spiritual exploration of process. She also uses the cycle's short plays to read back to other major Parksian works by focusing on the reoccurring theme of the Great Hole of History—the image of the forgetting and discovery of history—found throughout Parks's plays.

The collection concludes with two interviews and an extensive production history. The first of the interviews (conducted by Garrett) is with Parks herself;

the second (by Faedra Chatard Carpenter) is with Liz Diamond, Parks's frequent collaborator. Diamond's thoughts on Parks are particularly engrossing, especially her discussion of the challenges surrounding the direction of Parks's plays. Diamond suggests looking to Parks's wit and wordplay as a way into her work; an award-winning, groundbreaking writer can be profound and goofy by turns.

The detailed production history, compiled by Richard E. Kramer, begins with *The Sinner's Place*, Parks's thesis production at Mount Holyoke in 1984, and moves through *The Book of Grace*, which opened in 2010 at the Public Theater in New York. It also lists Parks's projects in development, such as screen-play adaptations of Toni Morrison's novel *Paradise* and Ira Glass's *This American Life*. The production history is a fitting end to the collection: in looking back over Parks's history and forward to her multiple future projects, it shows us Parks in medias res. As the writers in this text suggest with perspicacity, the past may be just a taste of what is to come.

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***Urban Bush Women: Twenty Years of African American Dance Theater, Community Engagement, and Working It Out.*** By Nadine George-Graves. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010; pp. 296, 38 illustrations. \$29.95 paper, \$18.95 e-book.

doi:10.1017/S0040557411000883

Reviewed by Hillary Miller, CUNY Graduate Center

In *Urban Bush Women: Twenty Years of African American Dance Theater, Community Engagement, and Working It Out*, Nadine George-Graves provides a comprehensive history of this Brooklyn-based contemporary dance troupe founded by Artistic Director Jawole Willa Jo Zollar. George-Graves investigates the salience of “work” in the context of Urban Bush Women: What works in the rehearsal room, and why? How do we work *through* choreography, and how do performers “work” an audience? How does the company's improvisatory style allow the individual dancer to *work it*? Taking a cue from her subject, George-Graves adopts a spirit of exploration to work through the group's process, products, and reception.

The author begins by introducing the company's development process and style before isolating in chapters five guiding elements of their work: “The Body,” “The Word,” “The World,” “The Soul,” and “The Community.” Although these divisions at first seem an odd organizational choice for a book about a company known for its fluid incorporation of disparate elements, it allows for a forensic approach to a complex aesthetic. George-Graves identifies character motifs that reverberate across every chapter: “finding the strength to survive adversity; calling upon the spirits and ancestors; overcoming violence and pain; reclaiming heritage, history, legacy, and memory; claiming agency and authenticity over the female identity (voice, body, and spirit); using the personal to connect with the universal; connecting to everyday life; and connecting to others” (35). Using dance as a