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## Dramaturgy in Motion: At Work on Dance and Movement Performance

by Katherine Profeta. 2015. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. 384 pp., 31 b/w images. \$26.95 paperback. ISBN 978-0-299-30594-9  
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Katherine Profeta's *Dramaturgy in Motion: At Work on Dance and Movement Performance* joins other exciting recent titles in the Studies in Dance History series from the Society of Dance History Scholars. Despite the increasing prevalence of dance dramaturgs, the role tends to be not well defined, in part because it does not take a standard form. Instead, it is idiosyncratically worked out in collaborative practice. What Profeta does in this book is to zoom in on the practice itself by means of her eighteen-plus year collaboration with Ralph Lemon, from her first encounters with Lemon as a graduate student in dramaturgy to the bulk of their professional work together. By focusing on the ideas and questions that the work has brought up over that time, she chronicles the nuanced thinking that is done in, with, and through the process of making dance performances.

The introduction sets out some anchor points for the flexible role of the contemporary

dance dramaturg. Profeta sets up an argument for the "quality of motion" that characterizes the work of the dramaturg who productively oscillates between such positions as inside and outside or theory and practice. The history moves between theater dramaturgy, from an institutional dramaturg like Lessing to the production dramaturgs employed by Bertolt Brecht, and dance dramaturgy, beginning with Raimund Hoghe who worked with Pina Bausch. However, Profeta also argues that such work needs to be placed in relation to the shifting forms of dance and theater themselves:

Thus it certainly seems as if, when theater lost the primacy of the playscript, gained a fascination with the embodied performer, and generally started to look more like dance, and when during the same decades Judson and Bausch invited their dancers to speak and use quotidian movements, and generally started to appear more like theater, the increased porosity between disciplines allowed the stealthy figure of the dramaturg to slip across the divide. (11)

Observations such as this highlight the strength of this book's perspective in beginning from the complexity of the practice itself and working outward. This methodology enables Profeta to begin to answer the need she identifies for "a more sophisticated conceptual toolkit for understanding existing collaborative systems" (21).

Each of the five chapters of *Dramaturgy in Motion* is based on one register of dramaturgical engagement: "Text and Language," "Research," "Audience," "Movement," and "Interculturalism." The first chapter works through the productive tensions and support systems that characterize dance's curious and multiple relationships to language, text, and word. In so doing, the chapter both illuminates and articulates what is already going on in dance work as well as the many openings through which dance-based works become part of broader systems of performance, an idea that is introduced

early in the chapter and returns in the coda on narrative. Beyond serving as a kind of tool and process for accessing performance material, language is also very specifically aligned by Profeta with the dance dramaturg's work of naming what she sees going on. Here, the various concerns that are articulated through *Geography* regarding spoken text and *Tree* regarding the ways in which words might elicit movement are ultimately reframed by means of the journey via *Come Home Charley Patton* and others toward the "negative-space use of language" in *How Can You Stay in the House All Day and Not Go Anywhere?*

The next chapter removes "research" from the purview of the academy, such as practice-as-research in higher education, and resituates it within the "democratization of the research function" (70). The historical framework for this encompasses both examples from the 1960s onward of workshop-based practices in theatre and dance as well as the very specific line of dramaturgical training based on the collection of materials into a casebook. Profeta distinguishes between research in the first register ("a collection of preexisting materials brought into a rehearsal room") and in the second register ("as new or unfamiliar materials generated inside that room through experimentation") while showing the ways in which these likewise feed each other in various configurations of collation and creation (79). Rather than telling a hero-narrative of solo research, Profeta thus situates her own research within the research of the dancers and other collaborators. A great example is from *How Can You Stay in the House All Day and Not Go Anywhere?* for which Profeta interweaves her own three lines of dramaturgical work, including rituals of mourning, with the dramaturgical work of the other collaborators, including Okwui Okpokwasili's construction of a "crying book."

The subsequent chapters on "Audience" and on "Movement" continue to develop detailed examples of dramaturgical questions and ideas, returning to many of the projects, which will have become known to a reader by this point, regardless of their previous familiarity with Lemon's body of work. Chapter 3 describes the logic of framing an evening-length event for those beyond the rehearsal studio. The fourth likewise focuses on perception and shaping, but of the moving body in itself. Chapter 4

develops questions of how movement means and to whom. This is the chapter that is least clear in distinguishing a dramaturgical perspective from other more familiar dance-based perspectives, such as that of choreography. However, the chapter seems to be written for those who might identify with dramaturgy more than with dance, and as such it productively argues for what the dance dramaturg's understandings of movement might bring to the practice of dramaturgy more generally.

The last chapter looks at how Profeta, Lemon, and other collaborators negotiate the thorny issue of interculturalism in the *Geography Trilogy*. Interculturalism and the concomitant acknowledgements of race, culture, and religion are presented in terms of both their potential as an explicit goal of the work and of their challenges, such as the lines between hybridity and appropriation. Citing scholars primarily from the fields of theater and performance studies to set up her concerns about the limitations of existing scholarship to the intercultural rehearsal room, Profeta ultimately turns to a collection of eight points of focus that guide the dramaturg's work toward ethical collaboration across uneven sites of power. Through this "ethical checkup" (187), Profeta touches upon such complex questions as "Even though the performers were not the instigators of the experiment, did they manage to use Ralph as much as he used them? ... Did the experience serve any of their artistic needs?" (193) and "When does the host's concern for guests become just another means of imposing beliefs?" (200). This final chapter takes advantage of and reinforces the dramaturg's mobile positioning, at once in a place to be sensitive to the dynamics of the space while also not herself immune from risk.

Along the way, *Dramaturgy in Motion* also offers insight into Lemon's body of work. Lemon has published extensively on many of the works that Profeta discusses, including books with process documentation on *Geography*, *Tree*, and *Come Home Charley Patton*. What Profeta adds to these is a view that oscillates between inside and outside—very much the way she describes the process of dramaturgy itself. Like Lemon, she shares a clear picture of what art making looks like from the middle, among other things, through material drawn from notebooks and emails.

But *Dramaturgy in Motion* also draws out key themes and questions that cut across these individual projects. In bringing these multiple perspectives together, the book offers readers a terrific model of what smart performance-making processes can look like today.

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## She Is Cuba: A Genealogy of the Mulata Body

by Melissa Blanco Borelli. 2016. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. 240 pp., 53 images, bibliography, index. \$99.00 hardcover, \$29.95 paper. ISBN: 9780199968176  
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In her new monograph, *She Is Cuba: A Genealogy of the Mulata Body*, Melissa Blanco Borelli makes a compelling case for the wisdom and power of the hips. She shows how the Cuban *mulata*, a mixed-race woman of European, African, and Native ancestry, wielded her hips to make a living, find pleasure, and negotiate with tropes that framed her existence. By analyzing *mulatas* and their historic dances, Blanco Borelli contributes importantly to Cuban studies and dance studies. For scholars of Cuba, the book not only illustrates the centrality of *mulatas* to Cuban national identity, but also complicates existing portrayals of the figure by showing how *mulatas* “step outside the limits of tragedy” that often mark their bodies (7). For dance studies scholars, Blanco Borelli interrogates the complexities of writing about subaltern bodies that danced in the past. Refusing the extremes of unshakable oppression and utopic agency, the author embraces a middle ground where women found spaces for economic and spiritual survival within coercive structures. Dwelling on the middle, *She is Cuba* invites deep reflection on the *cadera*, or hip, as a seat of knowledge with much to say about individual and collective histories.

This “genealogy of the *mulata* body” has four chapters and three interludes all linked by the theoretical thread of “hip(g)nosis.” Each chapter title begins with the neologism, which comes from the hypnotizing effect that *mulata* performers have on

male observers. Described as a “feminist response” to the objectification of the dancing *mulata*, hip(g)nosis “presents the *mulata* body as an intelligent, powerful materiality” (13–14). This theoretical intervention exposes racial and gendered violence while also showing how women of color used their hips to disrupt and even contest prevailing norms. Blanco Borelli examines hip(g)nosis in three historical moments: the nineteenth century in Chapter 1, the mid-twentieth century in the three interludes and Chapters 2 and 3, and the period from the 1970s to the 1990s in Chapter 4. The chapters analyze a wide range of materials including rumors, literature, advertising images, oral histories, interviews, periodicals, films, family history, and personal experiences. The interludes (following Chapters 1, 2, and 3) feature “performative writing” that riffs on themes covered in the preceding chapter (27). With varied materials and writing styles, Blanco Borelli honors the impressive dynamism of *mulata* performers who experimented and improvised in dance and daily life.

The bulk of the book focuses on *mulatas* dancing in mid-twentieth-century Cuba, and there lies Blanco Borelli’s greatest contribution. In Chapter 2, she tackles the elusive topic of *academias de baile*, a type of taxi dance hall that was a mainstay of Havana nightlife. Though discussed by previous scholars, Blanco Borelli focuses an unprecedented amount of research and analytic energies on the *academias*. She problematizes tendencies to dismiss the locations as marginal covers for prostitution. Instead, she suggests that *academias* were sites where *mulata* instructors and student-clients enacted Cuban-ness as they danced. To find new perspectives on these institutions, Blanco Borelli details her pilgrimage to where *academias* once stood. She wonders about the growling stomachs, monetary exchanges, aching feet and backs, and moments of joy—in other words, the social histories of dancers, during long, hot Havana nights. Despite a dearth of sources, she critically employs literary representations, interviews with male musicians, a published testimony from a female dancer, and her imagination to commune with the “ghosts of women who danced for dollars” (104). With her haunted analysis, Blanco Borelli revises understandings of mid-twentieth-century Cuba, placing *mulata* dancers at the center of a period undeniably shaped by their laboring hips.