

satire *Geneva*, his increasing tendency to identify as Communist over the years, and even his rethinking of dictatorship itself in the 1944 treatise *Everybody's Political What's What?* Yde privileges the unchanging psyche, sidelining the historical and political in deference to that psychological reading which—and on this I want to be clear—reveals much about Shaw but too little about the political systems he championed. Yde in fact closes his epilogue on Shaw and other Anglophone writers drawn to totalitarianism with a citation from Melville that highlights madness: a conventional move that lands *Bernard Shaw and Totalitarianism* in the realm of those studies that set aside twentieth-century dictatorships as inexplicable Others. With the aid of Bernard Shaw, perhaps we had the opportunity to learn something more.

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The Theatre of Tennessee Williams. By Brenda Murphy (with Bruce McConachie, John S. Bak, Felicia Hardison Londré, and Annette J. Saddik). Critical Companions. London and New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2014; pp. x + 307. \$90 cloth, \$27.95 paper, \$26.99 e-book.

doi:10.1017/S0040557415000678

Reviewed by Dirk Gindt, *Stockholm University*

The Theatre of Tennessee Williams forms part of the Bloomsbury Methuen Drama Critical Companions series and is divided into two main parts. The first, written by theatre historian Brenda Murphy, offers a detailed survey of Williams's oeuvre, spanning from his apprenticeship years up until the stage works he wrote shortly before his death in 1983. For the second part, Murphy commissioned four essays that present new insights into Williams's plays. Rather than focusing only on his canonical works, her objective is to contribute to "the project of seeing Tennessee Williams whole" (265) by charting his impact beyond his glory period on Broadway between 1945 and 1961.

Murphy convincingly contends that the playwright gradually channeled explicitly left-wing political aesthetics, equally influenced by naturalistic and expressionist drama, into a more "subjective realism" (16) that allowed him to explore fully the condition of the sensitive outsider in a materialist society. Early dramas from the late 1930s—like *Candles to the Sun's* exploration of a coal miner's strike, *Not about Nightingales's* attack on the inhumane conditions of the penal system, and *Stairs to the Roof's* depiction of the alienation felt by anonymous factory employees—illustrate Williams's ambition "to produce drama of political and social significance" (10).

How Williams fleshed out and varied his subjective realism is the theme of the following eight chapters, which shift their attention to the main corpus of his legacy, from *Battle of Angels* to *The Night of the Iguana*. A generous amount of citations of the playwright's notebooks and letters provides the necessary biographical context to understand his recurring concerns, fears, and obsessions. Among several highlighted stage productions is José Quintero's seminal 1952

revival of *Summer and Smoke* at the Circle in the Square, which had a significant influence on the development of Off-Broadway theatre. In essays on *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Chapter 5) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (Chapter 7), Murphy builds upon her previous research on the collaboration between Williams and Elia Kazan to explore the complicated but mutually respectful relationship between these two seminal theatre artists.

Chapter 10 on the later plays traces Williams's professional waning. Critics in the 1960s and 1970s attacked Williams not only professionally for the allegedly declining quality of his dramatic work, but also personally, their critiques often holding a thinly veiled homophobic agenda. Murphy illustrates the viciousness of some reviewers with carefully selected examples and emphasizes that "these [later] works are often startlingly original and revealing" (152). Given the wealth of material that Williams produced in the last two decades of his life, it is understandable that the book cannot cover every play; nevertheless Murphy's selection of case studies in this chapter seems slightly arbitrary. For example, a discussion of *Red Devil Battery Sign*, a play whose heavy allusions to the murder of John F. Kennedy recall the politically engaged drama of his apprentice years, would have been welcome in this context.

The four specially commissioned essays offer in-depth discussions of selected themes. Using as a springboard the poem "Cyclops Eye" from Williams's second novel, *Moise and the World of Reason*, Felicia Londré teases out the perennial struggle of artists who desperately hold on to their creative vision in spite of critical hostility and ridicule. Bruce McConachie borrows methodological concepts from cognitive theory to analyze the different reactions of New York audiences to *A Streetcar Named Desire* as a stage work in 1947 and, two years later, as a Hollywood version on the silver screen. John Bak's compelling reading of unpublished letters and drafts that Williams wrote in response to his critics reveals how the playwright saw himself "as the nation's psychotherapist" who wished to stimulate a "dialogue on topics heretofore taboo" (223). Bak further traces shifts in the cultural landscape from the "gentleman-critic" (225) of the 1950s and influential personalities like Brooks Atkinson and Walter Kerr—with whom the playwright maintained a cordial and respectful relationship—to the reviewers of the 1960s, who saw themselves as moral beacons and condemned the thematic violence and daring sexual politics of Williams's plays.

A highlight of the book is Annette J. Saddik's theoretically ambitious essay on grotesque elements and ambiguities. Inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin's study of the grotesque body, Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject, and Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny, Saddik eloquently argues that Williams's later works embraced human contradictions and revealed in them as a way to move beyond "realism's failed fantasies of stability and completion" (261). Plays like *Kingdom of Earth* and *A Cavalier for Milady* blur racial boundaries and query perennial dichotomies (masculine–feminine, human–animal, impotence–uncontrolled sexual appetite, and ultimately life–death). As Saddik argues, instead of trying to resolve these dualities, Williams deliberately kept the characters in these plays in a perpetual state of ambiguity in order to catch a fuller and richer representation of life with "the potential of new, unfamiliar possibilities" (261), including the potential for

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.

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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