

style Stein glimpsed in *Four Saints* is one that transmutes mournfulness, miraculously, into gaiety” (165). In the final moments of this chapter, Cermatori gestures helpfully toward “Stein’s meanings for queer and racial politics,” emphasizing how her baroque productively disrupts, defamiliarizes, and deconstructs established norms (180).

Cermatori is not the first to identify baroque leanings in Nietzsche, Mallarmé, Benjamin, and Stein (the Introduction and Epilogue, however, propose more provocative figures for future study in this regard). At times, the terrain he traverses has significant overlap with important scholarly work such as Martin Puchner’s *Stage Fright* and Samuel Weber’s *Theatricality as Medium*. These are quibbles, however. Cumulatively, Cermatori’s carefully researched book offers a significant lens for understanding not only the reach of the baroque on the history of modern aesthetics, but also its hold on contemporary theatre and performance art.

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Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Plays by Women: The Early Twenty-First Century

Edited by Peggy Farfan and Lesley Ferris. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021; pp. ix + 316. \$90 cloth, \$34.95 paper, \$34.95 e-book.

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When a critical essay collection as expansive as this new offering from Peggy Farfan and Lesley Ferris is released, it does more than mark the scope of contemporary plays in the field; it also maps the terrain of our current scholarly moment—the gatherings where potent collaborations began, the professional communities that shape our work, and the places where earlier scholarship has twisted and branched, opening up new lines of inquiry for emerging scholars to pursue. Although it is not the primary emphasis of *Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Plays by Women: The Early Twenty-First Century*, a vital scholarly genealogy undergirds this edited collection of twenty-eight chapters both from researchers who helped to establish the academic field of feminist theatre criticism and from scholars whose work is taking the profession in urgent new directions. Farfan acknowledges the influences of “literary foremothers” (2) on playwrights in the collection, but there’s also intrinsic feminist value in noting the ways feminist scholarly approaches have taken root in the academy. “I feel the best about scholars—the academic world,” Adrienne Kennedy told Branden Jacobs-Jenkins: “They Xeroxed my plays and kept them

alive" (15). As theatre departments, women's and gender studies programs, and producing organizations throughout the United States and around the world face ever-worsening funding cuts and closures, it is crucial that we articulate the significance of plays by women as well as the significance of our research within the larger fields of theatre, performance, dramaturgy, and dramatic literary studies. Just as Ferris writes in her galvanic "Afterwords" about the potent legacies of Maria Irene Fornés, Ntozake Shange, Judith Malina, Simone Benmussa, Nehad Selaiha, and others, her astute critique of the gender gaps in both pay and theatrical production asserts the radical necessity of simple forms of representation and the erasure that comes without it. The anthology is at its best when its contributors articulate the lasting force of theatrical innovations. "Oh look—eight women in a room. Explosive!" director Lileana Blain-Cruz says of *Fefu and Her Friends'* 2019 Off-Broadway revival (284), and the same goes for this anthology in its centering of plays by women from more than a dozen countries. As Winsome Pinnock says of women artistic directors' essential leadership in staging the work of women playwrights, "They had to fight for themselves and us," to which Ferris adds, "The fighting does not end" (291). So too is the case for feminist scholarship; in the shadow of *Roe v. Wade's* overturning in the United States, the women's protest movement in Iran, and the banning of women from universities in Afghanistan, the fight continues.

This collection's deep roots are evidenced by its origins. It grows out of a 2009 ASTR working session and a 2010 *Theatre Journal* special issue, which led to the book *Contemporary Women Playwrights: Into the Twenty-First Century* (2013). Like that preceding volume by the same editors, this one offers a similarly diverse range of essays from both new and returning contributors studying texts from around the world through a variety of methodologies. Whereas the introduction to the first book identified Lynda Hart's *Making a Spectacle* (1989), Sue-Ellen Case's *Feminism and Theatre* (1988), and Jill Dolan's *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (1988) as foundational texts grounding that work, this new collection seems to be situated in a way that is intentionally forward-looking and more expansive, exploring an array of dramatic media and genres. Here Netflix, Gadsby's *Nanette*, and *Orange Is the New Black* get their recognition alongside Homer's *Odyssey* and Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale*. This breadth is a hard-won victory, a multidirectional freedom that grows out of the finally undeniable critical canon on women's plays that Farfan and Ferris helped to establish.

Thus, the swift, teachable, almost bite-sized chapters of this 2021 volume enjoy the benefits of the field's growth. In general, they tend to spend less time on literary review, and more time on deftly argued analyses buttressed by precise production histories and close readings. I suspect this condensed format will work well for students and instructors alike since the revealing essays pair easily with assigned plays. For example, Katie N. Johnson and Sara L. Warner take readers on an illuminating blitz through "queer time" to understand how Paula Vogel's rejected doctoral dissertation from the 1970s became a version of *Indecent* (2015) that resulted in a successful submission for the Ph.D. under Warner's twenty-first-century supervision (52). Similarly, Esther Kim Lee's analysis of Julia Cho's *Aubergine* (2016) uncovers how foodways serve as ciphers of transcultural memory through layers of careful linguistic and cultural decoding (185–6).

Among all these well-curated and tightly self-contained chapters, the collection's only weaknesses are, perhaps, its imperfect section organization and, more

important, the absence of a discussion of “women playwrights” as a fraught category. The seven broadly titled parts are successful in their even distribution of four chapters each, yet some of the categorizations seem forced, and many overlap. This interconnectedness is mentioned briefly in the introduction but could also be creatively highlighted by the editors in other ways. Finally, during a moment when groups from The Kilroys to the Jane Chambers Award committee to Planned Parenthood are expanding their language around identity and inclusion—and in some cases even omitting the word “women” from their lexicons—the unquestioned adherence to the category of “Plays by Women” seems like a missed opportunity for inquiry. For a volume that is otherwise so comprehensive in scope and skillful in its treatment of feminism’s complex intersectionalities, the absence of this conversation is unfortunate, and certainly one that students will read as telling and meaningful. All the more reason that a third volume of this collection can’t come soon enough; there is much to say about theatre, womanhood, and life since 2020 that haunts the gaps and margins of this prescient work.

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Law as Performance: Theatricality, Spectatorship, and the Making of Law in Ancient, Medieval, and Early Modern Europe

By Julie Stone Peters. *Law and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022; xv + 350, 27 illustrations. \$115 cloth.

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Law as Performance: Theatricality, Spectatorship, and the Making of Law in Ancient, Medieval, and Early Modern Europe is a long-awaited book in the field of law and literature, as well as theatre and performance studies. The book’s author, Julie Stone Peters, is a veteran in law and literature, whose 2005 essay “Law, Literature, and the Vanishing Real: On the Future of an Interdisciplinary Illusion” helped shape the field precisely through its salutary skepticism. She is also an erudite theatre historian known for her *Theater of the Book: Print, Text, and Performance in Europe, 1480–1880* (2000). Her 2014 essay “Theatrocracy Unwired: Legal Performance in the Modern Mediasphere,” which begins with Plato’s *Laws* and ends with the fate of law in the age of digital media, announces a new project: the history of legal performance and spectatorship in theory and practice. The book under review shows that this project has come to fruition.