

## Book Reviews

**García-Romero, Anne. *The Fornes Frame: Contemporary Latina Playwrights and the Legacy of Maria Irene Fornes*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016. 232 pp.**

“All Latina playwrights are in some way Fornes’s theatrical daughters” (53), writes playwright, dramaturg, and theatre scholar Anne García-Romero in her book, *The Fornes Frame: Contemporary Latina Playwrights and the Legacy of Maria Irene Fornes*. The study has appeared at a felicitous and bittersweet time, with the recent passing of the master playwright herself and the worldwide distribution of Michelle Memran’s much-anticipated documentary, *The Rest I Make Up*. García-Romero provides an indispensable archive of five contemporary Latina playwrights—Caridad Svich, Karen Zacharías, Elaine Romero, Cusi Cram, and Quiara Alegría Hudes—dedicating a chapter to each, highlighting themes in their major works, and situating them in a genealogy of Latina theatre helmed by Fornes. *The Fornes Frame* stands out as one of the most accessible and informative critical companions to the work of these five contemporary Latina playwrights currently available. It has great pedagogical value as a contextualization of each playwright’s work with thorough critical sketches of their key plays, all of which have been under-examined in theatre scholarship.

To introduce Fornes as a decidedly Latina playwright and teacher for the purposes of her study, García-Romero narrates Fornes’s founding of the Hispanic Playwrights-in-Residence Lab at the INTAR Theater and foregrounds Latina themes in Fornes’s plays. The first chapter focuses on Fornes herself and documents compelling elements of her biography and of her artistic and pedagogical styles. García-Romero is meticulous in her chronicling of Fornes’s legacy, including in the book’s appendices a roster of INTAR alumnae and an essential bibliography of plays by Latina playwrights. All of this work is a testament to the scholar’s years of professional and personal immersion in Latina theatre.

García-Romero organizes the book’s analysis around cultural thematics central to Latina theatre: “cultural multiplicity, supernatural interventions, Latina identity, and theatrical experimentation” (6). While these are certainly important categories

of experience in Latina writing, they often lack specificity in *The Fornes Frame*. Race and sexuality, two central facets of “Latin@” life experience and identity (the non-binary label García-Romero deploys alongside Latina), seem to haunt the edges of the analysis. Fornes’s work and the work of her inheritors beg deeper engagement with lesbian relationality and racial (rather than broadly cultural) representation. The five analytic categories García-Romero emphasizes seem at times too capacious and nebulous, but what the book’s method might lack in theoretical engagement with recent Latinx studies broadly speaking, it makes up for in its revelations about Fornes’s pedagogical style and its lucid explications of work by Latina theatre’s current trailblazers.

*The Fornes Frame* is a tribute to the late playwright—heartfelt and critically astute. García-Romero has made a vital contribution to the conservation of Fornes’s legacies as a singular artist and as an iconoclastic and innovative teacher. *The Fornes Frame* is, likewise, an invaluable teaching resource; each chapter serves as a useful and illuminating critical companion to the playwright’s works. García-Romero’s personal reflections on her encounters with Fornes are not only affecting as we grieve Fornes’s recent departure, but demonstrate an ethics of generosity and intimacy for which to strive in our creative and scholarly work.

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**Valdés Bernal, Sergio. *El teatro cubano colonial y la caracterización lingüístico-cultural de sus personajes*. Madrid: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2018. 150 pp.**

Los estudios enfocados en el período colonial de América Latina han experimentado un auge importante desde la década de los ochenta del siglo pasado, particularmente en relación con los virreinos de Nueva España y Perú, con abordajes que incorporan perspectivas desde distintas áreas del conocimiento humanista. *El teatro cubano colonial y la caracterización lingüístico-cultural de sus personajes* de Sergio Valdés ofrece una perspectiva interdisciplinaria novedosa al integrar el análisis lingüístico y el estudio del género teatral de la Cuba colonial. Valdés incluye un detallado análisis de 307 obras dramáticas y persigue mostrar cómo a través de la implementación de rasgos lingüísticos se representan diferentes personajes sociales y culturales de este periodo.

En la introducción el autor establece la especificidad del drama y su conexión con el lenguaje: “La literatura dramática se distingue [...] por el hecho de que su contenido o trama se desarrolla y manifiesta mediante monólogos y diálogos” (9). Según Valdés, esa caracterización se da a través de rasgos lingüístico-culturales. El objetivo es lograr que el personaje se exprese de la manera más realista posible de acuerdo con el contexto sociocultural e histórico en el que se desenvuelve. En

la siguiente sección, el autor traza los orígenes del teatro colonial cubano con las primeras obras escritas ya en Cuba a finales del siglo XVIII. Valdés analiza por separado los textos cuya acción se desenvuelve fuera de Cuba y aquellos que se centran en tramas desarrolladas en la isla. El empleo del lenguaje utilizado en las primeras es caracterizado como un español metropolitano, idóneo para el “teatro serio” (36) y el más popular, cotidiano, para las comedias y sainetes. El lenguaje caracteriza sociolingüística y geográficamente a cada personaje, según el tipo de trama y tema.

En el tercer y más extenso capítulo, Valdés se centra en analizar a los personajes en torno a dos grupos: los no criollos y los criollos. El autor describe a cada grupo mayormente en los niveles fonético y léxico para establecer cómo los dramaturgos emplean estas caracterizaciones como un medio para suscitar reacciones jocosas y reforzar el carácter cómico de cada una de estas piezas. Con relativa frecuencia, en el texto se ejercen comentarios prescriptivos sobre el español representado en boca de los personajes: “los personajes gallegos caracterizados lingüísticamente [...] representan a gallegos incultos, ya que los cultos utilizan el castellano correctamente, y no un castellano atiborrado de errores de dicción” (61). Se pierde así la posibilidad de examinar el nivel de conciencia sociolingüística del dramaturgo al representar hablantes bilingües de español, por ejemplo. *El teatro cubano colonial* no problematiza el empleo del lenguaje como un recurso cómico. El material podría haberse prestado para un análisis más innovador, con una perspectiva teórica más reciente, sobre la caracterización lingüístico-cultural como un instrumento del discurso sobre la raza en la colonia.

Con excepción de esta perspectiva academicista sobre la lengua, el libro ofrece una perspectiva interesante sobre el empleo del lenguaje en los textos literarios en la colonia y presenta muchas y variadas opciones para estudios críticos futuros.

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**Lage, Susana. *Teatro. Entre mitos y desiertos*. Buenos Aires: Nueva Generación, 2016. 137 pp.**

Se trata de la primera antología de textos dramáticos de la autora sanjuanina Susana Lage, en la cual los mitos y el desierto de su lugar de origen y escritura se vuelven cuerpo, tema y personaje dramático. Las viejas fronteras que centralizaban desde lo porteño e invisibilizaban a buena parte de la producción escénica del resto del país —fronteras entre lo legitimado y lo periférico, cerradas y fáciles de verificar en el pasado— comenzaron a experimentar un fenómeno de porosidad que fue acentuándose con el devenir de las décadas de postdictadura. *Teatro. Entre mitos y desiertos* contiene seis obras individuales: *Crónicas de Ítaca*, *Menos el pecho de Deolinda*, *Lagartijas*, *El sueño de la mujer triste*, *Tudcum*, *Los rayos de aquel sol*.

Estas parecieran estar ubicadas en un orden que sugiere un sutil encabalgamiento, relaciones que podemos deducir al reconocer en todas la marca de estilo personalísimo de la autora, pero también en su devenir concatenado. Al terminar el libro advertimos que hemos asistido desde cada una y en total a la presentación de un cosmos que el lector sanjuanino puede reconocer como propio, pero del que se nos habla a partir de un lenguaje universal, tramado de múltiples voces intertextuales desde el teatro griego, pasando por Shakespeare y hasta el cancionero cuyano. En ese entorno, que es escenario y a la vez personaje, se abre el conflicto del desencuentro, pero rompiendo con la tesis realista del encuentro personal, abriendo una ventana surreal desde la imagen poética, desde un profundo procedimiento metafórico.

Los cruces entre teatro y poesía no son casuales en el estilo de esta dramaturga y poeta. En su escritura dramática, la imagen poética es la ventana a todos los posibles. Y en ese encuentro casi siempre frustrado de los personajes se erigen la memoria y el olvido en lucha permanente que no es otra que la lucha entre Thánatos y Eros, el eterno enfrentamiento entre la pulsión de vida y la pulsión de muerte. Se observa que la presencia de lo autóctono, de la geografía local y de su componente humano es el hilo cohesivo de las piezas del libro. Y es justamente en esta territorialidad de las obras (Dubatti, 2010) —desde esa peculiaridad— que se inscriben en la dramaturgia, en el teatro y en la literatura argentina. Es desde allí que traspasan las fronteras nacionales y supranacionales.

El teatro es “aquí y ahora”, “presencia y presente”, y eso se experimenta al leer las obras de Susana Lage, esa posibilidad de habitar, de una dramaturgia radicante, inscrita en el suelo y en los cuerpos, hoy, aquí. El teatro sanjuanino reclama textos que hablen desde nuestra territorialidad. Los elencos, tanto profesionales como independientes, y los diferentes niveles del ámbito educativo tienen hoy un material valioso y ecléctico para trabajar. En tanto textos dramáticos las seis piezas de este volumen se yerguen en tensión a la escena, a la encarnación en el cuerpo vivo del actor, en la materialidad propia del teatro. En síntesis, la poética de Susana Lage es proteica, rica en procedimientos metateatrales e intertextuales. Desde géneros que rozan a veces la comedia, otras la tragedia, aparecen procedimientos propios del teatro del absurdo y del distanciamiento brechtiano, acompañados por la omnipresencia de la imagen lírica y la metáfora. El cosmos teatral de Susana Lage es complejo, ciertamente, pero a la vez es cercano, reconocible en nuestros propios microuniversos. Su diálogo productivo con otras textualidades de la dramaturgia y la literatura universal logra hacer estallar los sentidos, descentrarlos, desterritorializarlos y paradójicamente acercarlos aun más al territorio; es la propuesta de un ejercicio que nos enraza a nuestra esencia para luego soltarla y re-crearla.

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**Diamond, Elin, Denise Varney, and Candice Amich, eds. *Performance, Feminism and Affect in Neoliberal Times*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. 315 pp.**

The manifestations of neoliberalism are as diverse as the nations subjected to its authority, and so too are the performances that have risen in defiance. In *Performance, Feminism and Affect in Neoliberal Times*, edited by Elin Diamond, Denise Varney, and Candice Amich, twenty-three essays by members of the Feminist Research Working Group of the International Federation for Theatre Research illuminate and critique the ways in which these performances on four continents challenge (or in some cases support) the neoliberal state and its consequences.

The anthology's editors argue that the neoliberal state reinforces not just the power of the elite, per David Harvey, but also the power of patriarchy. Therefore, they interrogate the featured performances through intersectional feminist and affect theories. In the second section of five, titled Violence and Performance Activism, Diana Taylor examines the work of Jesusa Rodríguez of Mexico and Liliana Felipe, originally from Argentina, who together have criticized the Mexican *dictablanda* (near-dictatorial control by neoliberal persuasion) for over thirty years. In 2006, Felipe effectively organized 3200 performances over fifty days for over a million protestors who occupied the Zócalo and Reforma in Mexico City to force a recount of presidential election votes.

Most of the activism documented here is performed by women, but not celebrated for that merit alone. For example, the feminist activists known as Femen International, who originated in Kiev and are now based in Paris, use a signature gesture in protest, painting their bare breasts with slogans they assert will be read by their target audience (men). However, Tiina Rosenberg, following Peggy Phelan, questions whether their actions, lacking critical analysis, actually re-inscribe the neoliberal position they claim to defy, particularly as responses to French Anti-Islamism.

Within the anthology, a number of the performances resonate with literal, physical danger, as activists put themselves in hazardous scenarios to embody the precariousness of life under neoliberal rule. Feigning death, Regina José Galindo of Guatemala inserts her body into a large plastic bag among heaps of garbage to be eventually discovered by dump workers. Amich reflects that the dump workers' lack of concern for the presumed corpse illustrates the casual disrespect for the lives of women whose femicides often go unprosecuted due to the sheer volume of such murders near the maquiladoras that employ the women for cheap labor. Referencing Judith Butler, Amich situates Galindo's various actions in a "shared corporeal vulnerability" (102) that draws its audiences into the true risks experienced by the activist and the women who are murdered while trying to make a living (102).

The researchers engaged in this anthology delve incisively into the nuances of affect stimulated by the varied performances. Specific socioeconomic and political histories contextualize each essay, but what emerges through reading the whole book

is the broader global weave of neoliberal dominance. The collection is sweeping and powerful, a testament to those who actively, creatively resist neoliberal abuse around the world—deficient only by the notable absence of African performances of resistance. Nevertheless, the book is itself an urgent textual indictment by unified researchers against neoliberalism.

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**Ybarra, Patricia. *Latinx Theater in the Times of Neoliberalism*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2018. 247 pp.**

History takes time, according to Patricia A. Ybarra. By Ybarra's own admission (though one suspects her preoccupation with these issues stretches back much further), her latest monograph, *Latinx Theater in the Times of Neoliberalism*, is the result of twelve years of wrestling with the difficulties of "stag(ing) the destruction and denigration caused by savage capitalism" (ix). Though the project has been percolating for much longer than the word "Latinx" has been in use, its examination of performance-as-resistance is as timely as ever.

Ybarra's book recalls the work of Latin Americanists such as Noe Montez and Jean Graham-Jones, but the author actually draws less from other scholars of performance than from adjacent fields such as cultural, literary, and subaltern studies to contextualize her study of U.S. Latinx performance-making. Favoring works that "refuse to privilege realism as an aesthetic strategy" (17), Ybarra focuses on the means employed by transnational "halfie" playwrights to "critique contemporary geopolitics by making theatre that reveals neoliberal violence as a systemic condition that is visibly, audibly, and tangibly comprehensible in its variations" (x).

In her critical introduction, Ybarra informs readers of the effects of neoliberalism on Latinx communities and explains that her goal is to "consider how a remarkable group of playwrights *theorize* the world rather than change it" (10, emphasis added). Though Chapter 1, "'Never Any Other Time but This Time No World but This World,' or Staging Indigeneity in Neoliberal Times," focuses mainly on playwright Cherrie Moraga, it is actually the widest in scope. Peppered with looks at recent work by El Teatro Campesino and *points of departure* (2005) by Michael John Garcés, this chapter gauges theatrical reactions to political shifts stemming from the fall of socialism and other radical leftist movements across the hemisphere.

Subsequent chapters narrow in their thematic attention to interrogate responses to specific issues. Chapter 2 looks at works created in the aftermath of the 1994 Balseros Crisis, including María Irene Fornés' *Manual for a Desperate Crossing* (*Balseros*) and Nilo Cruz's *A Bicycle Country*, both of which she terms "travelogue(s) of limited mobility" (80). Ybarra's argument is perhaps most nuanced in this chapter,

as she differentiates that limited mobility with the “affective properties of inhibited motion” (102) in the *Travelogues* of Eduardo Machado and *Sleepwalkers* by Jorge Cortiñas, connecting the plays to the struggles of many Latinx migrants. Chapter 3 explores theatrical responses to the femicide epidemic in the Americas, especially in Juárez, Mexico, while Chapter 4 looks at the legacy of drug trafficking. Other playwrights whose work is examined include Caridad Svich, Octavio Solís, Quiara Alegria Hudes, and Tanya Saracho.

In a brief conclusion, “So Go the Ghosts of...” Ybarra acknowledges that, though the impulse to theorize and not provide solutions is what makes this work meaningful, that impulse is also largely to blame for its relative obscurity. Contrasting these plays to the monolithic *Hamilton*, which leaves the violence of capitalism largely unexplored, Ybarra ends with an impassioned reminder that “an understanding of the recent past in the Americas is crucial to thinking our way out of our current situation” (199). Ybarra’s thoroughgoing monograph makes a vital contribution to that understanding.

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**Townsend, Sarah J. *The Unfinished Art of Theater: Avant-Garde Intellectuals in Mexico and Brazil*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2018. 301 pp.**

Sarah Townsend’s book, *The Unfinished Art of Theater*, provides an important contribution to the study of the avant-garde as expressed in theatrical forms in both Mexico and Brazil. Townsend explores the ways in which avant-garde aesthetics, as part of a larger global form of artistic contestation, manifested itself in those two countries, focusing on two intellectuals of the modernist period: Mario de Andrade and José Vasconcelos. Besides offering an overview of the history of the avant-garde, the book fills a void in comparing these two Latin American countries. Though the book is very specific and detailed in its analysis, it aims for a broader understanding of the period and the type of archival material analysis found in what the author calls “unfinished theater” (6). The term “avant-garde” proves hard to define, paralleling the unfinished ideas embedded in the archival material of unfinished works, writings, and performances.

Townsend starts by giving us an overview of her research and its philosophical backbone. There is an emphasis on ideas that would make the parallels between Mexico and Brazil explicit, using terms such as “periphery” or “semi-periphery,” as well as Roberto Schwarz’s “ideas out of place” to refer to modern liberal economic principles applied to countries like Brazil, where remnants of slavery and patronage were also present. This mish mash of unrelated economic and social concepts gave rise to countries that were on the one hand ready to modernize, and on the other liv-

ing with the same social structures as when they were colonies. Though compelling, some of these associations could use more revision. Schwarz's work, for example, is taken out of its specific context in concerning ways. It is also problematic that the differences between Spanish and Portuguese colonization are glossed over, or even de-emphasized, considering the vast literature that establishes the importance of those differences. The same issues present in the introduction continue throughout other sections, as the author applies a variety of European theories of the avant-garde to an essentially nationalistic and Brazilian phase of development. Though well-explained and conscious, this part would benefit from references to a more culture-specific set of critics from Brazil itself. However, these small oversights do not take away from the well-written and thorough introduction on the level of theory and historical background.

The book is essentially divided into two parts: three chapters on Mexico and three chapters on Brazil. In the lengthier Mexican part, Townsend examines different performances, theatre groups, and intellectuals of the modern period. In the case of Brazil, she focuses on the modern art period and two of its most well-known intellectuals, Mario de Andrade and Oswald de Andrade. In both cases, there is extensive analysis of musical renditions, sounds, and radio programs as part of the archival analysis. In fact, the author affirms in the introduction that "several moments along the way I almost decided I was writing a book about theater and sound" (23). The book offers original analysis of the modern period's vast collection of unfinished, hard-to-define performances that would otherwise remain forgotten. For its vast application and theoretical exploration, Townsend book deserves careful attention, not just from academics and artists, but also from students, offering an almost encyclopedic value.

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