

l'éclatement de tous ces murs artificiellement érigés pour et par l'Autre. Ceci afin de donner voie à l'en corps "inconnue," à l'imaginaire comme espace de reformulation et de présence à soi-même.

Si "en chaque mot, il n'y a de sens que celui que nous préparons" et bien souhaitons, selon le mot de Camus: "que toute une théorie [procession] de femmes" marchent dans leur pas.

THEIR PLACE ON THE STAGE: Black Women Playwrights in America

Elizabeth Brown-Guillory. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1988

Leslie Sanders

Getting a play professionally produced requires enormously complex negotiations with an overwhelmingly male social institution. Although it depends on "actresses," professional theatre almost never hires women to direct, light or design productions. And so, not surprisingly, few women playwrights have come to prominence. Afro-American playwrights, men as well as women, have similarly found professional dramatic theatre inaccessible. For example, between 1919 and the opening of Lorraine Hansberry's *Raisin in the Sun* in 1959, only 19 plays by black playwrights were produced on the Broadway stage, and Lorraine Hansberry's was the first by a black woman. Brown-Guillory's *Their Place on the Stage: Black Women Playwrights in America* is the first book-length study of black women playwrights, and it is an extremely fine and exciting venture into this new territory.

Brown-Guillory begins her discussion by recording differences. Between 1910 and 1940, roughly the period of the Harlem Renaissance, white women playwrights of the period — for example, Rachel Brothers, Neith Boyce, Susan Glasspell, Zona Gale, Zow Atkins, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Sophie Treadwell, and Ann Seymour — provided "serviceable melodramas, farces, mysteries and comedies" similar to those produced by their male counterparts. Black women playwrights of the same period — notably Angelina Weld Grimke, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Georgia Douglas Johnson, May Miller, Mary Burrill, Myrtle Smith Liv-

ingston, Ruth Gaines-Shelton, Eulalie Spence, and Marita Bonner — concentrated on serious drama, and on themes which explored and protested black poverty and oppression. Their plays depicted Christian racism and oppression of blacks, and particularly lynching; white persecution of the returning black soldier; the tremendous economic disparity between whites and blacks; and, finally, miscegenation.

Many of the plays are heartrendingly explicit; for example, in Georgia Douglas Johnson's *A Sunday Morning in the South* (1935) a grandmother sees her grandson grabbed from her home and lynched for a rape that he could not have committed, and in *Safe* (1939), a mother kills her newborn after listening to the cries of a lynch victim. The heroine of Angelina Weld Grimke's *Rachel* (1916) rejects her suitor, in part, because she refuses to bring more black children into the world. Her family has lost father and eldest son to a lynch mob. Others of the playwrights turned a critical and even satirical eye on black society, or recreated figures of black history.

While professional theatre still poses problems, community theatre has long provided women with theatrical opportunities. Important for understanding women's relation to theatrical production is the fact that most of these early playwrights lived in Washington D.C. where the Drama Committee of the NAACP and the theatre program at Howard University encouraged their writing and produced their plays. A favorite cultural goal of NAACP spokesperson W.E.B. Du Bois and other race leaders was the development of a black theatre; during this period, over 100 plays were written by black women and men for production on school and community stages. Brown-Guillory argues persuasively that the work of the women engaged in this effort provides a crucial women's perspective on the Harlem Renaissance.

The rest of this study focuses on three playwrights: Alice Childress, Lorraine Hansberry and Ntozake Shange, examining their plays in considerable detail and from several analytical perspectives. Each has succeeded on the professional stage, to great acclaim. Each has dealt creatively with the complex artistic problems caused by the dominant culture's stereotypical views of black people, its limited toler-

ance for forthright treatments of black life and its outright attempts to compromise the integrity of the black artist who would venture into the mainstream.

Alice Childress's writing — of fiction, essays and television scripts as well as of 14 plays — spans four decades. A founder of Harlem's American Negro Theater in the early 1940s (a beacon and a start for Sydney Poitier, Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee and others), she became, in 1950, the first black woman to have her plays professionally produced (that is, by unionized actors). In 1955, she became the first black woman to win the Obie Award, for her critique of black roles in American theatre, *Trouble in Mind*.

Lorraine Hansberry's reputation rests on her internationally recognized classic, *Raisin in the Sun*, which ran on Broadway for 538 performances, and was later made into a movie and then a Tony-winning musical. Her complex and moving portrait of a black family's struggle to heal itself and to assume its rightful place in American society revealed a playwright of remarkable promise, and her death of cancer in 1965 was a monumental loss. Two of her four other plays have been produced on Broadway (*The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* in 1964 and *Les Blancs*, posthumously in 1970). Ntozake Shange is best known for the long-running, award-winning and internationally successful *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf*, a choreopoem depicting black woman's coming of age and into sorrow, strength and finally joy. Similarly experimental in form, her other plays have been produced in a variety of major theatres in several countries.

Brown-Guillory takes up the plays in each of three chapters: first treating their "tonal structure," then their formal structure and finally, their images of black people. Her discussions are rich and stimulating; in particular, she applies a racially specific paradigm of human development in order to illuminate the specificity of the plays' forms. Calling her chapter "Structural Form: African American Initiation and Survival Rituals," Brown-Guillory proposes a six-stage personal and/or political odyssey or search for wholeness in which characters move from beginnings in community, to confusion and doubt caused by "the nigger moment" (the first encounter with racism); to the quest for

how to cope with it; to a compulsion to speak out and finally to transmitting the wisdom acquired and reintegration into the community. Footnotes suggest personal acquaintances as the source for the theory. Whatever the source, as the basis for describing the structures of the works under discussion, it is wonderfully illuminating, particularly in its power to reveal the intersections of race and gender in the individual development of the characters. *Their Place on the Stage: Black Women Playwrights in America*, then, is not only a fine study, it is also a splendid example of why one needs different paradigms and questions to understand the experience and the literature of marginalized people.

Many of the early plays that she discusses are published in James V. Hatch and Ted Shine, eds. *Black Theater USA: Forty-Five Plays by Black Americans, 1847-1974* (New York: The Free Press, 1974).

WOMEN COMPOSERS, A Lost Tradition Found

Diane Peacock Jezic. New York: The Feminist Press, 1988

Ann Armin

Women Composers, A Lost Tradition Found offers a fact-filled overview of the work of women composers from the eleventh to the twentieth centuries. Reading this 250-page volume, I found myself taken on a voyage of discovery into the virtually unexplored realm of the musically creative woman. Jezic surprises the reader into an awareness of the long line of women composers that stretches from the fascinating and prolific Hildegard of Bingen, abbess of a convent in the eleventh century, to Judith Lang Zaimont, composer-in-residence at Wesleyan University.

The book is divided into five sections corresponding to the major periods in musical history: medieval and baroque, classical, romantic, romantic and early twentieth century, later twentieth century. Jezic has selected twenty-five composers, and provides a chronology, a short biographical essay, an analysis of one or more scores, a selected listing of compositions/discography and a bibliography

for each. We meet the composer's contemporaries, both male and female, and gain a quick-study insight into the musical context in which they worked and the changing role of women composers over the centuries.

Author Diane Peacock Jezic is a pianist and music historian who teaches music literature at Towson State University. As she tells us in her preface, the book is designed to accommodate the needs of music history and Women Studies courses. It is also accessible to those of us who are unable to answer the simple question, "Can you name three women composers?" One happy feature of the book is that recordings of the scores selected for musical analysis are available on two cassettes specially produced by Marnie Hall of Leonarda Productions.

In spite of their success and popularity in their lifetime, and despite the quantity and quality of their output, most women composers prior to the twentieth century are largely forgotten in today's concert halls and go unmentioned in musical textbooks. Clara Schumann, for example, was a major composer of German lieder, solo piano works, concerti with orchestra. In P.H. Lang's prodigious *Music in Western Civilization*, she receives the following honourable mention: "Clara Wieck, the daughter of his (Schumann's) first piano teacher, one of the most distinguished women musicians in history, and an understanding and enthusiastic propagator of his music, became his wife after an epic courtship in 1840." A quick glance through the bibliographies supplied in *Women Composers* soon makes apparent that the correction of this astounding neglect of women composers in standard texts is being handled primarily by women, by means of articles and books.

It also becomes apparent that the last hundred years has brought about some positive changes in the status of women composers. Prior to this period, compositions by women were performed either in the religious setting of medieval or renaissance convents or in the intimate settings of musical academies, the European courts or chamber music evenings in the home. It is not until the mid-1800s that we hear of the first performances of large-scale works written by women. It would seem that American composer Amy Beach heralded a new era for women's music. In 1882, her concerto for alto and orchestra,

Eilende Wolken, was performed by the Symphony Society of New York, their first performance of a work by a woman. Her symphonies were performed by the Boston Symphony and other American orchestras as well as orchestras in Leipzig and Berlin. Of the six living women composers selected by Jezic, all have received recognition through performances in prestigious musical venues, commissions, financial support and awards. In 1983, Ellen Swilich was the first woman composer to receive the Pulitzer Prize.

LUNA

Sharon Butala. Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1988

Eleanor Dudar

Embedded in the specific context of Canadian prairie life, concretely realized in precisely rendered detail, the central preoccupation of Sharon Butala's *Luna* is woman — her nature, her roles, and their meanings. Butala has drawn a strong trio of characters to embody her argument — Selena, defined almost completely by her roles as wife and mother; her younger sister Diana, who increasingly refuses definition of herself in these terms; and their aged Aunt Rhea, who lives alone in a tumbledown house, bakes bread in a wood stove — yes, she chops her own wood — and grows a flower garden on the thin prairie soil that no one else can match.

The novel is full of incident, beginning in June — taking us through a twenty-fifth wedding anniversary community dinner, a fowl supper, a 15-mile cattle drive in blinding snow at temperatures of -30, a family Christmas, and a Women's Night Out — and ending in March with the birth of a child to Selena's daughter Phoebe, at midnight under the full moon. Butala makes us feel the rhythm of the country year, where the change in the land and people's activities are so closely entwined. Much of this rhythm is reflected through Selena, working long hours in her garden in summer, preserving her harvest in the fall, assisting her husband Kent with the cattle throughout the year. Her sister Diane, unable to follow in this path, strikes out for the city, seeking civilization and the something-more she is unable to put a name to.

Diane, or Diana — she takes on more