

child, and that child alive and expressing herself in the adult. She brings forward the essential femininity of the nature Carr was attuned to. Blanchard embeds Carr's persona in a complex person, one who was brave and spiritual, but also overweight, irritable, socially insecure.

Blanchard, then, restores to us a larger, realer version of the Emily Carr temporarily lost in the disapproving tone of much of Maria Tippett's Governor General's prize-winning biography, *Emily Carr*. Blanchard's Carr is one of us, imperfect and struggling. Carr's own words tell us that her strength lay in her will to embrace the struggle, whether alone in an abandoned Indian settlement where "you... wrestle with the elements, with all your senses alert, to see and hear, and feel" or at home where "I'm always... bursting forth making enemies instead of friends, whirling around in a muck of rage, muddying everything and getting all wrought up."

Blanchard's Carr finally transcends both the struggle and death itself. Her last years were

*in spite of aches, fatigue and growing economic troubles... gloriously productive...*

*Her spiritual calm, even happiness, in the face of death found expression in the growing joyfulness and vibrancy of her paintings. "Movement is the essence of being. When a thing stands still and says 'Finished,' then it dies." In both substance and spirit she was painting life itself, affirming it with more intensity and abandon as she grew older.*

While reading *The Life of Emily Carr*, I sometimes wished Paula Blanchard had never read Maria Tippett's *Emily Carr*. Through Blanchard's desire to explicitly take issue with Tippett's less generous conclusions about Carr, Tippett's book becomes a major presence in Blanchard's, sometimes obscuring Carr herself. All the same, this is a fine biography, meticulously researched and crafted, richly inspired by Carr's life, and by a recognition of her greatness as an artist.

This recognition also informs Doris Shadbolt's *The Art of Emily Carr*, an excellent companion volume to Blanchard's, close to it in attitude, and fulfilling the wish that Blanchard evokes, to see more of Carr's work.

*The Art of Emily Carr* was originally

published to widespread critical praise ten years ago — in one reviewer's words, "this is the kind of art book to take with you to the moon." It sold thirty thousand copies, and has now been re-issued as a large-format paperback. This is a beautiful volume, its 196 pages containing over 200 illustrations, 135 of them colour plates.

A rare greatness in art moves a work beyond the technical issues that art critics and historians usually discuss to a place where technique becomes identical with personal vision and discussing it becomes a very tenuous activity. Thus, though Shadbolt traces Carr's stylistic development well and provides an outstanding overview and grasp of Carr's output, she faces a difficulty in talking about it in the normal ways. Even in her skilled hands, formal discussion falters, gets lost in Carr's vision. We see this shifting, for instance, in the following passage:

*[Carr's] formulae for handling forest and undergrowth vary from cubistically cut and chiselled shapes to moulded and overlapping plastic slabs of green to swirling heavy streams and ropes of growth, but they all belong to a concept of nature that is still, silent, mysterious...*

Yet when, as she very often does, Shadbolt lets Carr speak for herself, we become privy to the heart of Carr's painting process and the aesthetic vision animating it. Shadbolt has culled Carr's journals and other writings to find passages that relate to particular paintings, and has placed these alongside the paintings in her book.

*The Art of Emily Carr* is strongly researched and impressively assembled, a labour of love and many years. However, there is no index giving the pages on which the plates occur, and no reference numbers in the text, despite the fact that the plates have been numbered. This omission somewhat reduces the pleasure of reading this magnificent book.

## LA THEORIE, UN DIMANCHE

Louky Bersianik, Nicole Brossard, Louise Cotnoir, Louise Dupré, Gail Scott, France Théoret. Montréal: Les Éditions du remue-ménage, 1988

*Dominique Bourque*

A la question: "Qu'est-ce qui est incontournable dans le féminisme?" six écrivaines répondent; chacune à son tour, selon son style, linéaire ou spiralé, piqué d'humour ou mordant de verve; chacune aussi, selon le biais de son choix, qu'il s'agisse de retracer les moments de la conscientisation féministe, de revoir les modèles (héroïnes?) qu'offre ou n'offre pas la littérature, qu'offrent ou n'offrent pas les médias, ou même, de s'interroger sur l'objectivité de la critique masculine face aux textes de femmes. Si bien qu'à la fin, on a davantage l'impression d'avoir assisté, à travers la multiplicité de leurs voix, au déploiement d'idées, de réflexions s'entrecroisant là où justement prend corps, l'incontournable "honnêteté" (dirait Gail Scott) des femmes, au sein même de leur différence.

Evidemment, pour celles (et ceux) qui auraient beaucoup lu en la matière, il y a redite. Mais cela même est nécessaire affirme Louise Cotnoir: "Pour les femmes, cette tactique de la répétition signifie un instrument subversif qui leur permet de modifier, d'ébranler pour le moins, l'édifice des certitudes. Parce qu'avec ce procédé, les écritures des femmes contrarient la faculté d'oubli chez la sujète, faculté qui la dispose à la vie qu'elle recommence, reproduit sans se rappeler les blessures, les aliénations, la tragédie de son sexe."

C'est dire qu'en vingt ans de luttes, la partie n'est pas gagnée. C'est dire également la restriction des moyens d'action. On n'a qu'à songer à la langue, nous rappellent-elles, et aux pièges que celle-ci ne cesse de tendre aux femmes. Quand Louise Cotnoir veut parler de la "sujète" par exemple, elle ne peut pas utiliser le mot "sujet" qui renvoie inévitablement la femme (sujette!) à sa fonction de complément (par rapport à), son rôle d'objet "utilitaire" (inscrit par ces contours clos!). On peut facilement imaginer les conséquences d'un tel état de fait dans nos sociétés modernes soulignent Louise Dupré: "Schizée..., la superwoman doit adopter un comportement masculin pour réussir dans la vie et un comportement féminin pour réussir sa vie."

Dénonçant donc elles aussi cette logique "qui repose sur le refoulement du féminin comme genre," "qui nous a fixées, figées sur le mauvais plan des choses" et a fait de notre réalité une fiction, elles proposent, par la forme même du recueil,

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