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Loren Kruger. *The Drama of South Africa: Plays, Pageants and Publics Since 1910.* London and New York: Routledge, 1999. xi + 227 pp. $25.99 (paper), ISBN 978-0-415-17983-6.

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Performing South Africa

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The distillation of more than thirty years of observation of and research into South African theater, Loren Kruger's *The Drama of South Africa: Plays, Pageants and Publics Since 1910* is an outstanding book, giving a comprehensive account not just of the formal theater produced in South Africa since the formation of the Union in 1910, but also of the various pageants and ceremonies marking significant historical moments such as centennial celebrations or the inauguration of Nelson Mandela in 1994. In thus tying a history of the nation's theatre with a history of its state-sanctioned staging of itself, Kruger gives us a superb account of South African performance in general – of the official versions of the Union, of the apartheid state, of the "new" South Africa, as well as of the counternarratives provided by black theater groups, anti-apartheid groups, and contemporary workshop groups addressing social issues such as AIDS and gender relations.

Kruger's analysis of South African drama highlights the syncretic and dialectical nature of its progress. The reader thus has a palpable sense of the tremendous tension between state and/or authoritarian attempts to fix South African society (or fragments of that society defined by race, ethno-linguistic group, or gender) in rigid hierarchical categories, and efforts by performers and directors to resist such objectification, to become agents (per)forming a dynamic South African society.

Kruger thus opens the book by showing how black South Africans in the Union years were able to use state sanctioned images to "represent themselves as modern agents, even in the performance of 'tribal sketches,' and thus contest the state's exclusive claims to modernity" (25). What is particularly valuable and admirable in Kruger's work is that the broader theoretical claims she makes with regard to performance in general, tradition and modernity, coloniality and postcoloniality, etc. are all thoroughly grounded in material detail. In the early chapters of the book, for instance, we find thorough but concise archival retrieval of attempts by black South Africans (notably Herbert and Rolfes Dhlomo) to establish an African national dramatic movement despite the absence of funds and in the teeth of outright state hostility. Likewise, in considering the work of anti-apartheid dramatists, Kruger does not merely offer *explications de texte*, but thoroughly explores issues of theater administration, production, and attendance under the severe restrictions of apartheid's racial policies.

In this section, again, she gives us a sense of the tension between the state-sponsored provincial performing arts boards, the independent Market and Space theaters (in white areas of Johannesburg and Cape Town respectively), and of black township resistance theater. She makes the intriguing observation that since 1994 (a period whose drama she classifies as post-anti-apartheid rather than simply post-apartheid) "without the binding force of a common enemy, discrepancies in economic and social conditions opened too wide to permit easy appeals to a unified national culture" (191). As a result, she says, the most innovative recent work in South Africa has "more often happened on the festival circuit or outside theatre altogether, than on the mainstages of the subsidised theatre" (195).

None of these logistical explanations come at the expense of interpretation, however. Indeed, I can envisage readers using *The Drama of South Africa* as a reference tool for information about the published works of a diverse range of writers already recognized as significant (e.g., Herbert Dhlomo, Bartho Smit, Athol Fugard, Mbongeni Ngema, Zakes Mda), and more recently emergent voices who do not yet have much name-recognition outside South Africa (e.g., Ismael Mohamed, Brett Bailey, Susan Pam-Grant). Kruger offers particularly insightful readings of important plays such as Dhlomo's *Cetshwayo*, Fugard's *The Bloodknot*, Adam Small's *Kanna Hy Ko Hystoe*, and covers a comprehensive range of the-

atrical modes from Gibson Kente's musicals to work by Indian South Africans, to the satire of Pieter-Dirk Uys, to the Wits [University] Rural Facility workshop productions with their accompanying comic-strip publications.

Throughout the book, but particularly in the final chapters, Kruger also pays close attention to gender issues and the potential of performance to erode patriarchal hierarchy. While she cautiously enough cites theater activist John McGrath as saying, "Theatre cannot cause a social change," but "can articulate the pressures toward one" (216), Kruger ends *The Drama of South Africa* in a refreshingly committed and positive manner, insisting on the need for progressive theater practitioners in South Africa to participate in national education and media by means of performance. Kruger's book encapsulates the idealism of South Africa's new constitution, along with a level-headed historical knowledge of the various national formations that have preceded the present one. It should be read by all who care about (per)forming post-apartheid society –by government ministers, arts administrators, actors, directors, and literary scholars alike.

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