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***Trans/Acting: Latin American and Latino Performing Arts.* Eds. Jacqueline Bixler and Laurietz Seda. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2009 (266 pp).**

Trans/Acting: Latin American and Latino Performing Arts provides a nuanced and timely analysis of contemporary Latin American and US Latino/a performing arts at a time when borders are constantly being crossed and reformulated. Edited by Jacqueline Bixler and Laurietz Seda, the collection includes fourteen essays by established scholars in the fields of Latin American and Latino/a theater and a performance script by renowned Chicano artist/writer/performer Guillermo Gómez-Peña. Centered around questions of globalization and its effects, the book aims to “foreground, question, and dismantle contradictory notions of border” (17). The individual essays in the collection succeed in achieving this goal by investigating the work of playwrights, actors, and performers that partake in multiple border crossings (linguistic, national, sexual, genre), which challenge static understandings of physical and symbolic borders.

The strength of the book lies in its thematic diversity. The essays deal with a wide range of topics including gender and sexual identities, immigration and borders, history, and the politics of race from multiple theoretical frameworks. The book also represents diverse nationalities and cultural practices. The playwrights and performers whose works are examined in the text come from Argentina (Rafael Spregelburd, Patricia Suárez, Susana Torres Molina), Cuba (Abelardo Estorino), Mexico (Sabina Berman, Vicente Leñero, Paquita la del Barrio), Uruguay (Gabriel Peveroni), and the US (Guillermo Reyes, Guillermo Gómez Peña), and address various socio-political and historical realities. One of the weaknesses of the collection is that despite its transnational focus, some of the individual studies remain anchored in national specificities and contexts. Little attention is given, for instance, to the ways in which Latin American and Latino/a performing arts inform each other or the extent to which Latino/a performing arts is influenced by the artistic expression of other US ethnic/racial groups.

The book opens with an insightful introductory essay in which Laurietz Seda examines the ways in which the processes of globalization have impacted Latin American and Latino/a performing arts, and calls for the need to “(re) think, (re) create, and (re) articulate the interstitial spaces that permit an interrogation of limits and absolute, reductionist movement” (14). Seda also defines the scope of the collection which rather than aiming to comprehensively analyze Latin American and Latino theater, strives to be a compilation of works that “consider the various





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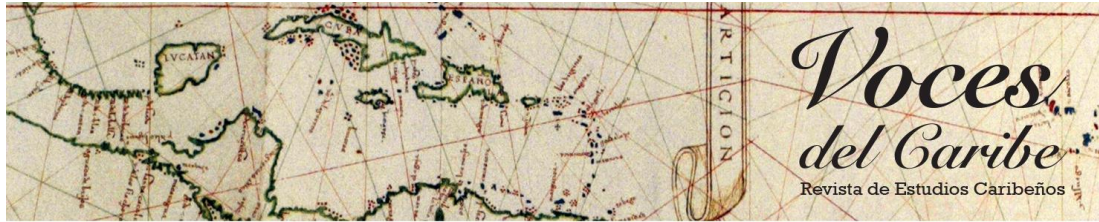
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meanings of the prefix ‘trans’ (e.g., ‘across,’ ‘on the other side,’ ‘through,’ ‘beyond’) as a way of understanding not only performance practices but also contemporary society and the human condition in this age of globalization and shifting borders” (16).

Genre issues and the politics of adaptation figure prominently in the collection and are the subject of several essays including Jacqueline Bixler’s “The Politics of Tradaptation in the Theater of Sabina Berman” and Camila Stevens’s “Theater Transformations: Reading Race in Abelardo Estorino’s *Parece blanca*.” Despite differences in socio-cultural and historical contexts, both essays show the transgressive potential of adaptation as well as the intricate relationship between text, context, and audience. Examining Sabina Berman’s play *eXtras* (2003), a tradaptation (adaptation and translation) of Mary Jones’s Irish play *Stones in His Pockets* (1999), Bixler suggests that Berman’s work is not a mere adoption or reproduction of a “foreign”/European cultural product, but rather a “scathing critique of globalization and its deleterious effects on cultural identity” (73). Bixler’s study challenges the negative connotations surrounding cultural and linguistic translatability by showing how Berman successfully adapts Jones’s Irish play to the political and cultural realities of contemporary Mexico. Whereas Bixler focuses on translatability, Camila Stevens’s convincing analysis of Estorino’s play *Parece blanca*, an adaptation of Cirilo Villaverde’s 19th century novel *Cecilia Valdés*, focuses on travel, change and transformation. The critic observes that the “travel life of a play... transforms its politics and adds layers of meaning well beyond the author’s original artistic version” (91). Stevens also argues that the reception of *Parece blanca*, which has been performed in multiple contexts and localities, reveals the importance of race in understanding past and present articulations of the Cuban nation.

Actors and performers take center stage in several essays including Becky Loling’s “Performing Gender in... *Y a otra cosa mariposa*,” Gastón Alzate’s “Paquita la del Barrio and Translocal Theatricality: Performing Counter (post) modernity,” and Guillermo Irizarry’s “Standing in Cultural Representation: Latino Stand-Up and the Original Latin Kings of Comedy.” Loling’s essay analyzes the implications of “cross-gender casting” in Susana Torres Molina’s play ... *Y a otra cosa mariposa* and observes that the actress’s body, dressed and performing as a man, functions as a site of resistance that disturbs gender binaries and complicates fixed notions of gender identity. Also focused on gender issues and the body, Gastón Alzate analyzes the complex figure and performance of Mexican singer, male-bashing icon, Paquita la del Barrio. The study reveals the complex responses elicited by Paquita la del Barrio’s





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public persona and suggests that Paquita la del Barrio challenges, among other things, traditional models of female beauty and behavior propagated in Mexican popular culture. Guillermo Irizarry's timely essay analyzes the problematic representation of Latino/a identity in the successful stand-up performance, *The Original Latin Kings of Comedy*. Irizarry's exploration of the complex "dynamics of production and consumption" (188) through his reading of this comedy show provides a useful framework from which to examine the interplay of cultural authenticity, market politics, and the consumption/absorption of Latino/a cultural texts.

The collection concludes with Guillermo Gómez-Peña's engaging performance script, *Mexterminator vs. The Global Predator* which is preceded by Laurietz Seda's critical essay "Trans/Acting Bodies: Guillermo-Gómez Peña's Search for a Singular Plural Community." Peña's highly original and experimental series of "hybrid texts" forces the audience to enter a dialogue with multiple voices/characters that engage various issues including immigration, cultural assimilation, mainstream politics, and cultural stereotypes. According to Seda, Peña's work is an exemplar of trans/acting which she defines as "the conscious use of performance and negotiation as strategies to reinvent and redefine the art and politics of living in-between cultures, ethnicities, nations, professions, and genders, among others" (228). Indeed, *Mexterminator vs. The Global Predator* crosses genre, linguistic, gender, and geographical borders and evinces the multiple links between performance, art, and identity politics.

Trans/Acting is an effective and insightful study of the implications and effects of globalization on Latin American and Latino/a theater and performing arts. The collection makes a valuable contribution to the fields of Latin American and Latino/a theater, performance, and cultural studies and will appeal not only to scholars in these areas, but anyone interested in the transformative power of artistic expression.

Sobeira Latorre
Southern Connecticut State University

