



"Mouths on Fire with Songs": Negotiating Multi-Ethnic Identities on the Contemporary North American Stage (Cross/Cultures)

Caroline De Wagter

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This book, the first cross-cultural study of post-1970s anglophone Canadian and American multi-ethnic drama, invites assessment of the thematic and aesthetic contributions of this theater in today's globalized culture. A growing number of playwrights of African, South and East Asian, and First Nations heritage have engaged with manifold socio-political and aesthetic issues in experimental works combining formal features of more classical European dramatic traditions with such elements of ethnic culture as ancestral music and dance, to interrogate the very concepts of theatricality and canonicity. Their "mouths on fire" (August Wilson), these playwrights contest stereotyped notions of authenticity. Inspired by songs of anger, passion, experience, survival, and regeneration, the plays analyzed bespeak a burning desire to break the silence, to heal and empower. Foregrounding questions of hybridity, diaspora, cultural memory, and nation, this comparative study includes discussion of some twenty-five case studies of plays by such authors as M.J. Kang, August Wilson, Suzan-Lori Parks, Djanet Sears, Chay Yew, Padma Viswanathan, Rana Bose, Diane Glancy, and Drew Hayden Taylor. Through its cross-cultural and cross-national prism, *"Mouths on Fire with Songs"* shows that multi-ethnic drama is one of the most diverse and dynamic sites of cultural production in North America today.

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