

Memory, Allegory, and Testimony in South American Theater: Upstaging Dictatorship. By **Ana Elena Puga**. New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2008.

Pp. 284 + 30 illus. \$95/£65 Hb.

Reviewed by Adam Versényi, the University of North Carolina,

anversen@email.unc.edu

This book is a valuable addition to the growing body of English-language research on Latin American theatre. In clear prose free of jargon, Puga analyses plays by five South American playwrights that were performed in Southern Cone theatres between 1965 and 1991. Her discussion of Uruguayan Carlos Manuel Varela, Brazilians Augusto Boal and Gianfrancesco Guarnieri, Argentine Griselda Gambaro, and Chilean Juan Radrigán juxtaposes theatrical performances with societal performances of state power as well as counterhegemonic performances. She thus demonstrates how the theatrical works dynamically interact with their contexts and become a part of ‘a collage of oppositional performance intended to undermine ideologies of dictatorship’ (p. 13). For example, Boal/Guarnieri’s historical allegories about the slave leader Zumbí, the independence leader Simón Bolívar, or the general Tiradentes are shown to depict them as the ‘new man’, called for by Che Guevara, who will foment Socialist revolution. This was in direct opposition to the Brazilian dictatorship’s official depiction of national heroes as anticommunist founders and protectors of the nation. The author also shows how these political plays that sought to transform ideological orientation became aesthetically innovative. Varela’s purposeful creation of a ‘fractured mirror’ held up to society, for instance, obliged the audience to piece together the work’s meaning in the same way they had to continuously interpret the chaotic society under dictatorship they inhabited outside the theatre.

Ricoeur’s call for an ‘ethics of memory’ is a constant presence. Each playwright’s work is discussed using one of his categories: the duty to remember (Varela), the duty to inspire (Boal/Guarnieri), the duty to conceal (Gambaro) and the duty to tell (Radrigán), providing insightful perspectives onto their specific work. Although remaining somewhat underdeveloped, the most fascinating part of Puga’s book is, however, her epilogue, where she looks at how these plays that responded to specific repressive societies can be performed today without losing their original force and meaning. Surveying recent productions of the plays in Italy, Argentina, Chile and the US, she persuasively demonstrates how culturally aware theatre practitioners imaginatively avoid folkloric and dehistoricized productions, and instead challenge non-Latin American audiences to think more politically about this region.

Stages of Emergency: Cold War Nuclear Civil Defense. By **Tracy C. Davis**.

Durham: Duke University Press, 2007. Pp. xvi + 439 + 58 illus. \$89.95 Hb; \$24.95 Pb.

Reviewed by Scott Magelssen, Bowling Green State University, magelss@bgsu.edu