
Theatre Research in Canada
Recherches théâtrales au Canada

Jacqueline Petropoulos, ed. “Linda Griffiths, New Essays on Canadian Theatre, Volume 9”

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Volume 40, numéro 1-2, 2019

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1068264ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1068264ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Graduate Centre for the Study of Drama, University of Toronto

ISSN

1196-1198 (imprimé)

1913-9101 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Chrystian, T. (2019). Compte rendu de [Jacqueline Petropoulos, ed. “Linda Griffiths, New Essays on Canadian Theatre, Volume 9”]. *Theatre Research in Canada / Recherches théâtrales au Canada*, 40(1-2), 166–167.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1068264ar>

PETROPOULOS, JACQUELINE., ED.
Linda Griffiths: New Essays on Canadian Theatre,
Volume 9.

Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2018, 184 pp.

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Dear Linda, Dear Duchess

The ninth volume in the *New Essays on Canadian Theatre* series is the first ever essay collection to give scholarly attention to the heterogenous works of the late Linda Pauline Griffiths, a collection long overdue in the critical records of Canadian theatre. Published in 2018 by Playwrights Canada Press, this volume is edited by Jacqueline Petropoulos and fills a critical gap by bringing together eleven myriad contributors from the Canadian academic and theatrical community, some of whom knew Ms. Griffiths personally, celebrating her theatrical legacy.

The volume tackles many prominent works from Griffiths's *oeuvre*, giving readers insight into the intimate impact she had on those with whom she worked before her passing in 2014, at the age of 60 from breast cancer. Petropoulos introduces Griffiths as an artist with a unique creative process, as a master performer and playwright with a passion for unconventional women, and a theatre-maker who followed her feminist impulses throughout her career. Petropoulos locates Ms. Griffiths within both the Canadian nationalist and post-nationalist eras, as well as one who creates within a magical and spiritual dimension, weaving biography with history, fantasy with fiction, genre with experiment. As a first critical collection on Linda Griffiths, this volume is largely intended for the scholar of Canadian theatre studies in English and the lineage of feminist theatre in Canada.

The volume boasts an extensive ten-page bibliography citing no less than 32 works on which Griffiths herself is the sole or co-author, along with other prominent theatre scholars such as Maria Campbell, Jill Carter, Jill Dolan, Linda Hutcheon, Ric Knowles, Peggy Phelan, and Jerry Wasserman. While the language and methodology vary from chapter to chapter, the collection does not feature any visual archival material, and, despite an intense focus on her plays, Ms. Griffiths's voice and views on her own work are only sparsely cited.

The critical chapters are all contributed by English speaking, Canada-based academics working in Drama or English, giving the analytical chapters scholarly authority within a lens of Canadian theatre studies. The approaches to play analysis with which the contributors engage are varied, only containing minimal forays into the wider discipline of performance, and no chapters written by an Indigenous author. Penny Farfan explores Griffiths's *Age of Arousal* (2007) through adaptation theory as she argues against Griffiths's resistance of categorizing it as an adaptation (21), while Brent Wood looks at *Alien Creature* (2000) and the tragic story of Gwendolyn MacEwen as a failure of magical faith (35). Ann Wilson reveals Griffiths's approach to the paradoxical notion of truth in *The Darling Family* (1991), arguing

that Griffiths sees “truth” as an interrelation between the actors themselves and the audience’s willingness to believe in them (51). Sherrill Grace produces a comparative literary analysis between Timothy Findley’s novel *Famous Last Words* (1981) and Griffiths’s play *The Duchess: AKA Wallis Simpson* (1998), capturing the slippage between Findley’s metaphorical approach versus Griffiths’s embodied illusion (66).

Amanda Attrell, tackles Griffiths’s approach to autobiographical, embodied portraiture across multiple archival drafts of *The Last Dog of War* (2005-2016), unearthing Griffiths’s autobiographical and historical weavings. However, the most notable article in the volume is contributed by the volume editor herself, entitled “Re-Viewing *Jessica* and *The Book of Jessica*: Critical and Cultural Transformations” in which she tackles the most contested work(s) from Griffiths’s career, addressing the charges of appropriation and reproducing colonial relations of power. With fine-tuned nuance and sensitivity Petropoulos concludes that there are no easy answers when it comes to Griffiths’s works, and that the aforementioned plays are contested sites of creation that grapple with Canada’s colonial legacy in theatre (121). Shelley Scott contributes the final critical chapter, tracing the development process of Griffiths’s last play entitled *Games: Who Wants to Play?* (2016). According to Scott, *Games* is a foray into Griffiths’s “[...] fascination with fantasy, group identity, and belonging” (122), demonstrating Griffiths’s interests in youth culture at the end of her life. Taken together, these chapters provide a heterogenous and non-prescriptive view of a complicated, experimental, and at times contested, feminist Canadian artist.

The remaining chapters of this collection are personal recollections by practitioners that collaborated with Griffiths over her career. In the opening chapter Paul Thompson describes his memories of collaborating with Griffiths and witnessing her personal growth. Playwright Daniel MacIvor assembles his perspectives on Griffiths’s improvisatory process, approach to narrative, and perception of her personal character. Curiously, both men fill space with comments on Linda’s sexuality and physical attractiveness. The location of these masculine perspectives on a woman-centred artist are called into question with remarks such as “she was gregarious, but at the same time more than a little off-putting with her plaid shirt, unshaven legs, and construction boots” (15), or “[...] though [*Lianna*] seemed determined to be political, there was a teasing, self-conscious sexuality at play that made it feel a little too personal to be coldly political. Of course now I’m just describing Linda,” (78). However, the final chapter entitled “Linda Did Not Want To Be A Boy, But She Wanted Their Stage Time” contributed by Layne Coleman shares touching letters about Ms. Griffiths in a language that speaks directly to her, saying “you made farmers sexy with *Paper Wheat* and you wrote plays that are being done around the world, telling stories that give women centre stage” (146), providing the final sentiment and takeaway of the book.

In conclusion, this volume is a critical first step into the vast landscape of Linda Griffiths’s creative, literary, and theatrical legacy; it is by no means comprehensive or conclusive, but serves as a necessary signpost for those seeking to know more about this significant woman of Canadian feminist theatre in English. Petropoulos’s assertion that this volume addresses a critical gap in the record holds true, yet it paradoxically serves to reveal that studying an artist as variant and heterogenous as Griffiths is to study a body in motion, a transformative being that by nature can never be fixed in space.