

From: Kevin Killian
Subject: Carla Harryman's Memory Play

... I'll jump in & give my 2 cents worth on *Memory Play* [O Books, 1994]. I am an American actor who was trapped inside the darn thing for ten months in a workshop production here in San Francisco, and I'll tell you, it took me eight and a half months before I figured out what it was "about." Harryman, the author, and Philip Horvitz, our director, were always mum whenever any of us actors asked, two Cheshire cats sitting there creamily on the sidelines, always replying only, "You decide." So finally I did. Hope you're familiar with the film "Mildred Pierce," because "Memory Play" is "Mildred Pierce" with a happy or at any rate conciliatory ending.

However I may be wrong about this. Years ago I wrote a review of Harryman's book *Vice* and stated forthrightly my belief that *Vice* must have been influenced by CH's constant viewing of the US cop show "Miami Vice." Two minutes later the phone was ringing and she denied it, saying she had never watched MV in her life! Consequently I know a little bit about "Memory Play" but don't go by me.

I played the "Miltonic Humiliator" and had a wonderful costume, designed by John Woodall, a kind of Worth gown and a huge Merlin type hat. I had to sing and dance in several production numbers, and taunt all the other characters; finally, defeated by my own love for the Pelican, I succumbed to a kind of Madama Butterfly swoon and killed myself-off stage. It was great, and Cris, you can see it on video if you have the VHS format over there. All the other actors were good, and I was a bit abashed because CH and PH, realizing that the Miltonic Humiliator doesn't really have very many lines in the published script, and perhaps not wanting to waste my talents, allowed me, no, ordered me, to make up my own lines.

I remember initially during our first workshop version of "Memory Play," that Kathy Acker was playing the part of the "Pelican,"—I suppose CH couldn't secure Kathy for the ten months it took us to rehearse and present the play. But think of her saying those lines, her great, scabrous energy melting the proscenium.

Thanks for letting me put in my two cents on "Memory Play."

Kevin Killian, "Excerpt" from *poetics@*, edited by Joel Kuszai, (EPC Digital Library, 2012), pp. 26-28.