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Book Review: L.H. Stallings, *The Afterlives of Kathleen Collins: A Black Woman Filmmaker's Search for New Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021)

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L.H. Stallings, *The Afterlives of Kathleen Collins: A Black Woman Filmmaker's Search for New Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021), pp. x-212, ISBN 978-0-2530-5903-1 (pb), \$25.00.

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The title of the book neatly describes the project: that the book is not just about the legacy of Kathleen Collins, writer, playwright, filmmaker, editor, film professor, but also a continued way in which we can discover her, not just in the present, but for a usable future. To this end, L.H. Stallings tosses conventional ideas of biography, to attempt a versatile, innovative, and creative methodology of writing black women's biographies. In deconstructing the paucity of Hollywood biopics of black people, and forwarding a new genre, after-life writing, to throw light on 'complex poly-recognition and new forms' (18), she offers new approaches to the problem of biography that will be influential. After-life writing also reveals the traces of non-recognition and dismissal of black women's work. Her suggestion that a certain US nationalism has overcrowded Black Studies as a plausible explanation for Collins's lack of acknowledgement is persuasive. Example of Collins's engagement with non-western forms of understanding the world run through the book, starting with a description of spiritual cosmologies in Collins's 1971 script, 'Women, Sisters, and Friends'. Collins's absorption with Haitian Vudu, to be differentiated from the interest shown by others such as Zora Neale Hurston, is highlighted through Stallings's readings of Collins's oeuvre.

The book is framed by the notion of 'anteriority of Black film' by which she signals an approach to film history that does not devolve around traditional national histories, but that may be rooted in non-western narrative and gnostic practises. As with Alice Walker's 'In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens' (1983), Stallings includes other forms of black visibility such as quilt making. A reading of the quilt as anterior to filmmaking and short story writing is conveyed with some passion in an extended discussion of the short story, *Raschida* (2019). In considering Collins's investment in interiority, Stallings attempts to show how Collins came 'to employ transvisual approaches to body, embodiment, eroticism and sexuality' (39).

Stallings covers examples of short stories, epistles, scripts, diaries, and films, and attempts to link them through the concept of adaptation. She considers that for Collins, adaptation was an 'abolitionist genre and a practise of cinematic marronage' (118). Chapter 4 on cinematic marronage is extensively contextualised, a strength through the book. Detailing the use of the carceral in mainstream Hollywood film, she presents Collins's film *The Cruz Brothers and Miss Malloy* (1980) as anti-carceral.

Each chapter of the book is introduced by a non-expository piece that seeks to convey the mood and rhythm of the chapter that follows; these add to the pleasure of reading the book. The author conveys her personal connection with Kathleen Collins. Individual chapters draw out indigenous practises in Collins's work. Discussing love as a crisis of possession, Stallings maintains that Collins was exploring the concept of revolutionary love, while questioning the cultural compulsion toward romantic love.

Examples are drawn from the screenplays *But Then She Is Madame Flor* (1986), and *Only the Sky is Free* (1985). The sense of love as a form of psychic possession is also examined in the film *Losing Ground* (1982). Stallings explains that Collins' aim was to establish a new genre in film, 'love stories cemented in polytheism and ecstasy as opposed to romance and monotheism' (59).

A lecture that Collins gave in Howard University in 1984 is quoted extensively to substantiate her claims for Collins's uniqueness. Stallings imagines Collins 'as a teacher in space, training students how to resolve the tensions and contradictions of placing Black living beings in any space being exploited by white exploiters' (91).

The book places Collins's work in the cultural and social contexts of her times, providing the reader with useful information on how the sociological and the aesthetic/philosophical might intersect. A particularly relevant piece towards the conclusion of the book emphasises the psychic dimension of black women's cancer, and more generally, illnesses. A reading of the quartet of one act plays, *Begin the Beguine* (1984) exemplifies what is at stake for black women who seek to find 'psychic knowledge that unveils connections between life-forms' (174). The battle is to arrive at a 'narrative of self-determination' (161). The lasting importance of this message was patent in the Oakland Theatre Project's production of the plays in 2021. The future uses of the ideas conveyed in the plays was further emphasised by the Berkeley Art Museum's panel discussion on Kathleen Collins. *Afterlives* adds to the continuing exploration of Collins's work.

Stallings's focus on showing Collins's distance from western, and US carceral ideologies is apparent in her rhetoric, and the reamplification of claims through the chapters. This reader found them a distraction, but others might find these interjections purposeful in foregrounding the cultural backdrop of Collins's work. The approach the book takes to black women's biography is a significant contribution to film studies, women's studies, and cultural studies.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

