Esther Kim Lee, “‘Remember to Forget’: A Study of the Family in Contemporary Plays from the Korean Diaspora in the U.S.”

At the turn of the twenty-first century, only a handful of plays about the Korean diaspora in the Americas had been written, and playwriting was not a familiar choice of profession in Korean diasporic communities. But within ten years, theatre has attracted a growing number of talented writers who have used the stage to dramatize and crystalize the world they know and imagine. The purpose of the paper is to examine representative plays about family in the Korean diaspora since the late 1990s. The word diaspora, which literarily means scattering, evokes a sense of displacement and loss as well as adaption and survival. The paper analyzes how the reoccurring themes and issues about family derive from such dispersed sense of existence and how the existence is also dynamic and constantly changing. By focusing on Cleveland Raining by Sung Rno, Satellites by Diana Son, American Huwagap by Lloyd Suh, and 99 Histories by Julia Cho, the paper explores the ways in which family has been imagined by the playwrights as a microcosm of the diasporic condition. The study also includes discussions on the playwrights’ dramaturgical representations of prodigal or absent family members who embody themes of belonging, home, assimilation, memory, war, success, and ethnic identity.