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Ann Arbor, Michigan
Sandra Seaton, Reading and Reception
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Good evening and welcome to The Shaman Drum. My name is Raymond McDaniel, and I am the author events coordinator here at the store. I would like to thank you for coming out tonight to greet Sandra Seaton, the author of *The Bridge Party*, included in *Strange Fruit: Plays on Lynching by American Women*.

One of the most auspicious ironies—and difficulties -- of clear writing is the degree to which it depends on the familiar to evoke a necessary recognition from the reader. We have an inherited familiarity with the styles and symbols, which are meant to connote specific moods but sometimes flatten those effects while simultaneously notifying us to respond to those moods in prefigured ways.

For example, there are a number of devices that rise as flags which are meant to alert the reader, or the audience member, that something awful has occurred. Overt violence, disjunction, speed and narrative hysteria: each of these refers to a sense of disaster or threat. But the irony is that when we recognize these clues for what they are meant to indicate, our collective response is frequently axiomatic and therefore automatic; and, by virtue of being automatic, curiously placid.

It's akin to the feeling you get when the music swells at the end of a cinematic melodrama; you know thoroughly that it's time to cry, and the certainty of that knowledge reduces the quality of the experience.

It is Sandra's accomplishment to realize the dramatic trap this dynamic represents and move so gracefully to avoid it. *The Bridge Party* refers to the house searches that are the result of a white citizen's paranoia in the wake of a lynching, and mere mention of the word "lynching" is sufficient to conjure a variety of ready-made, emotionally charged devices with which Sandra could have constructed her dramatic action. Fortunately, and impressively, she avoids this. By limiting her action to a place removed from the scene of the crime and defining her characters as those women who are invested in these events without directly creating them, Sandra neatly sidesteps the cheap temptations and emotional froth that could easily overcrowd her material. What she offers instead is more interesting and more harrowing. *The Bridge Party* succeeds because its author understands and makes use of the history that informs it without capitulating to the most reductive elements of that history.

This is made especially vivid in Sandra's use of time in the play, which is starkly effective in how it reminds us that much of what makes terror and anxiety so oppressive is the way, contrary to the common representation, that they do not obscure detail and minutiae but rather inhabit them, tainting the quotidian with the horrific, eating up regular time with the eeriness of its opposite.

It's an effective and admirable strategy. I'm pleased to have Sandra share her work with us, and I'm glad to have you join me in welcoming her tonight.