

access digital version and the web-accessible clips provide a perfect parallel for the populist appeal and structure of *Walterdale*. At this time, electronic book readers have yet to gain traction, though some new devices appear to be capturing consumer interest; in the near future, an integrated source of text, images, and videos could be the most vibrant means to disseminate research.

As a contribution to Canadian theatre, *Hot Thespian Action!* deserves notice, not just for the novelty of the subject, but for the perceptive commentary of the critical materials and the eclectic collection of undiscovered plays.

MONIQUE MOHICA AND RIC KNOWLES, eds.

Staging Coyote's Dream: An Anthology of First Nations Drama in English, Vol. I.

Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2003. 459 pp.

MONIQUE MOHICA AND RIC KNOWLES, eds.

Staging Coyote's Dream: An Anthology of First Nations Drama in English, Vol. II.

Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2008. 367 pp.

ANNIE SMITH

Ric Knowles and Monique Mohica, the editors of both volumes of *Staging Coyote's Dream*, are situated in Ontario. As a collaborator, Mohica brings her history of being nurtured by Spiderwoman Theatre and her experience as an actor and playwright and collaborator with Turtle Gals Performance Ensemble. She is a former artistic director of Native Earth Performing Arts. Knowles is Professor of Theatre Studies at Guelph University and an editor for *Canadian Theatre Review*. His books include *The Theatre of Form and the Production of Meaning, Shakespeare and Canada*, and *Reading the Material Theatre*; he is general editor of the book series *Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre* from Playwrights Canada Press.

The two volumes of *Staging Coyote's Dream* present a collection of twenty plays by fifteen playwrights, published between 1986 and 2004, Volume I ending in 2000 and Volume II beginning in 1996. The playwrights are Native American writers from both Canada and the US because, as the editors explain in their intro-

duction to Vol. I, “the decision not to restrict the plays to those produced within the geopolitical boundaries of Canada makes two implicit claims. [. . .]he right of First Nations peoples not to be subject to the political or legislative regimes of later-day nations; [and . . .] a history that long precedes contact or colonization, that has not been superseded, and that cannot be circumscribed” (iv).

I make a point of situating the editors in Ontario because I believe this has a bearing on the choices of plays in these two anthologies. The playwrights who are included in these volumes are, for the most part, connected by the fact that they are “a family of theatre artists who share certain aspects of their heritage and certain experiences of the contemporary world” (iv). I understand this quite literally for the artists included seem to constellate around Spiderwoman Theatre in New York (Miguel, Borst, Mohica, Turtle Gals); the Centre for Indigenous Theatre, founded by Favel (Toronto); and Native Earth Performing Arts (Toronto), with which a number of the playwrights have been associated (Moses, Highway, Taylor, Nolan, Mohica, Dandurand). The exceptions to these constellations are Shirley Cheechoo, the founder of De-ba-je-ma-jig Theatre (also Ontario); Margo Kane and Marie Clements, west coasters; and William S. Yellow Robe Jr. from Montana. The “certain experiences of the contemporary world” may also refer to the post-colonial project of Native identity and the weight of experience of colonial oppression which haunts and is, indeed, the subject of many of the plays in these two volumes.

As a teacher and director of works by Native playwrights, I admit to some curiosity as to why these particular plays/playwrights are included in this two-volume anthology. Anthologies, by their nature, suggest an editorial rationale for their contents; Knowles and Mohica, in their introduction to the first volume, tell us that this is “a collection of plays that appeals to us and challenges us as editors” (iii). They take care to explain that they are not attempting a representative collection but an “eclectic selection” of plays and playwrights. This disclaimer notwithstanding, I would appreciate more elucidation of their choices, particularly as the second volume has little to offer by way of introduction and many of the playwrights appear for the second time, in their own right or as members of collectives. The second volume would gain by including the excellent introduction from the first volume which offers readers useful discussions of terminology in a field that is developing in resistance to western forms of theatre, while,

of necessity, using western concepts to explain itself and its projects. The introduction to Vol. II again asserts the editors' "personal selection" (iv), a disclaimer that they can only represent "some of the wondrous diversity of contemporary First Nations playwrights and the plays they create" (II iv).

What is the difference between the two volumes? Volume I includes plays by Drew Hayden Taylor and Tomson Highway, arguably two of the best known Native playwrights who have had considerable influence on the development of the field of First Nations Drama in Canada. "Aria," by Highway, predates *The Rez Sisters* and forecasts later work that also utilizes the story-telling form. Taylor's play, *The Girl Who Loved Her Horses*, is a poignant one-act that is the writer's own favourite of all his plays, in sensibility more like his earlier work, *Toronto at Dreamer's Rock*, than his later comedies. These two writers are not represented in Volume II apart from a quote from Highway in the introduction.

Also included in Volume I is a realistic drama by William S. Yellow Robe Jr., a celebrated American playwright. Spiderwoman Theatre, Monique Mohica, Daniel David Moses, Yvette Nolan, Floyd Favel, and Marie Clements are represented in both volumes. Newcomers in Volume II are Shirley Cheechoo, Murielle Borst, Margo Kane, and Joseph Dandurand. Muriel Miguel (Murielle Borst's mother), a member of Spiderwoman Theatre is represented solo, and Monique Mohica is represented as a member of Turtle Gals Performance Ensemble. Volume I has four of nine plays by women; Volume II has seven of ten plays by women. There are a number of one-performer plays—Volume I contains only one example while Volume II contains six—an interesting variance in itself, reflecting a current trend in non-Native theatre.

Mohica and Knowles's assertion of "wondrous diversity" needs to be examined. A number of playwrights are represented in both volumes, which limits diversity. Conversely, including the same playwrights in both volumes allows readers to make interesting connections, such as the different treatments of a story told to Floyd Favel by his mother in both "Governor of the Dew" (Favel) and "Trial of the Otter" (Miguel). I find it valuable to be able to compare works by one writer to see how their interests in theme and form change. The two plays by Floyd Favel and Yvette Nolan, for example, are very different from each other in form and sensibility. Nolan's *Annie Mae's Movement* tells the story of Anna Mae Aquash from her work as a teacher to her unsolved murder at Wounded Knee. Marie Clements's two plays, while

choosing to address historical events, move very differently from each other. *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* pursues the murderer of women in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. *Burning Vision* links the mining of uranium in the NWT to the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Daniel David Moses's plays offer three explorations of the minstrel show form, employing irony so thickly one almost chokes on it. The polyvocal influence of Spiderwoman Theatre can be heard in the plays by The Turtle Gals, Mohica, Miguel, and Borst.

Personal serendipities? I particularly appreciate the inclusion of "A Path With No Moccasins" by Shirley Cheechoo, the founder of De-ba-jeh-mu-jig Theatre, a company whose role in the development of First Nations Theatre in Canada is seminal and whose plays are largely unpublished. "A Path With No Moccasins" is breathtaking in its autobiographical stance, clearly demonstrating Highway's quote: "before the healing can take place, the poison must first be exposed" (II, iii). Another gem is "Please Don't Touch the Indians" by Joseph Dandurand. This play has the biting hilarity one appreciates in Drew Hayden Taylor, as the Cigar Store Indians relive their past with Coyote, Raven, and Wolf, while being photographed by a succession of stereotypical tourists. After seeing three different performances of Margo Kane's "Confessions of an Indian Cowboy," it is curious to see it fixed in print and to appreciate the interplay between the script and the writer/performer's interpretation within the performance.

While I maintain that these two volumes are not and cannot be comprehensive or fully representative in their selection, this argument suggests that there are many, many plays, from other regions of Canada, that were not chosen—Prairie writers, for instance (other than Favel). The work being written and produced may demand volumes III and IV in the next decade. It is early days to consider which plays by Native playwrights might be canonical, and some of the plays—or playwrights—included in this anthology may well make that cut. Knowles has previously cautioned against the building of canons as exclusionary. Publishing is a political act and choosing plays for an anthology is likewise. What this anthology offers is a solid and informed base from which to explore First Nations Drama. One hopes that readers will be inspired to seek out further new work by Native playwrights, both published and unpublished.