

tions, films, memoirs, Shakespeare's own work, editorial practices, Elizabethan and Jacobean historiography, and finally, many of these topics within modern drama, I found it difficult to keep sight of what to take away from this collection.

Nevertheless, the scope and depth of the essays Martin and Scheil have included within this book is impressive, eliciting discussion and arousing interest in forthcoming projects by the contributing authors. Martin and Scheil's collection can fruitfully be read in conjunction with Ruby Cohn's 1976 landmark study *Modern Shakespeare Offshoots*, Julie Sanders's and Linda Hutcheon's discussions of the art of adaptation and appropriation, as well as Margaret Jane Kidnie's *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation. Shakespeare/Adaptation/Modern Drama*, an imposing assemblage of publications from English and Shakespeare scholars, will also prove useful to anyone interested in discussions of 'self-adaptation,' as well as Shakespearean and modern textual and performance histories.

**JENN STEPHENSON, ed.**

***Solo Performance.***

Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English. Vol. 20. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2011. xxxvi + 206pp.

HERVÉ GUAY

The end of the collection "Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English" will make way for "New Essays on Canadian Theatre." The titles announced already signal the prominence of a plural—even multicultural—vision of the theatrical phenomenon. Since this perspective was quite obvious in the Press's preceding collection and without yet having had the chance to define its contribution through several published volumes (as of this writing only the first, *Asian-Canadian Theatre* is out), it is difficult to predict how this new series will innovate in its approach. Perhaps the collections' composition will be modified. We know that in the past, Playwrights Canada Press tended to bring together texts published elsewhere on a given theme, accompanied by a small number of additional studies commissioned by the director of the publication when deemed necessary. Rather than speculate about the future, however, let's focus instead on *Solo Performance*, the penultimate title published in 2011 and edited by Jenn Stephenson. The choice of this Queen's

University professor to supervise the work was hardly surprising given that her monograph *Performing Autobiography in Canadian Drama* is to be published shortly by the University of Toronto Press. Indeed, there is a very close link between the two books, with the biographical and autobiographical constituting, in both cases, a central focus of discussion.

There is no room here to summarize all the articles in *Solo Performance*. Suffice it to say, however, that they extend over a long temporal continuum—1972 to 2011 specifically—and cover a vast geographic area, from Newfoundland to British Columbia, while examining stage practices for both mainstream and marginal audiences. To be sure, these articles demonstrate a more pronounced interest in the latter, since, as many authors emphasize, the one-person show and autobiographical performance are often an inexpensive way to render art more accessible to those artists and audiences usually excluded from the conventional theatrical field.

Stephenson's work, moreover, clearly highlights those excluded from mainstream theatre: more than half of the eighteen texts are devoted to them. This emphasis therefore gives the impression of a theatrical institution open to minorities, marginal elements, and certain highly diverse aesthetics. One senses implicitly that the situation isn't all roses by the number of times the authors insist on the position of resistance to authoritarian discourse, a resistance defended by the solo performances analyzed. Although the word WASP isn't spelled out, we have no doubt who governs this society as those marginalized by gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality speak in these one-person performances. The other striking characteristic of many of the studies is to show precisely how the solo performance is viewed as an act of survival by those who write about and interpret it. Renate Usmiani highlights this when she affirms that this genre "[m]ost often, [...] is used to underline the isolation in which a character moves, and his/her state of alienation" (9).

This collection of texts is not merely theme-based, however. Some of the most thought-provoking articles focus on the theory and aesthetics of these one-person-shows. The contributions of Ann Wilson, Ric Knowles, and Jennifer Harvie, as well as those of Sherrill Grace and Katherine McLeod stand out. In this regard, Wilson's thoughts on technology and the actor's performance appear highly contemporary. Twenty years ago she wrote: "No story is unmediated; all are determined and shaped by the forces or technologies of the society because, at the very least, the performer is an effect of technologies" (43). Although there is now

no longer much need to demonstrate the dialogical character of the monologue, the fact remains that in 1994 Knowles and Harvie had a firm understanding of how Bakhtin's writings on the subject could be put to good use. Although Sherrill Grace is not the only one to elaborate on the issue of solo performance, self, and identity, it is she who insists most on the complexity of the interaction between these three elements during the performance. Katherine MacLeod, on the other hand, stresses the role of improvisation in her discussion of solo performance, including that of the audience and the voice in its reception. Through illustrative examples, she situates the dialogism of the solo performance.

A work such as Stephenson's would not be complete without analyses of the best Canadian solo performances, offering a Quebec reader the opportunity to measure his ignorance of Canadian stage practices in English. To my knowledge, few of the shows mentioned in Stephenson's work have been produced in Quebec, with the exception of those by Daniel MacIvor, Guillermo Verdecchia, Nina Arsenault, the famous *Billy Bishop Goes to War*, and no doubt a few others. Accordingly, the authors of these studies are all the more convincing that, for example, one really should have seen *Red Mother* by Muriel Miguel or Wendy Lill's *The Occupation of Heather Rose*. Based on the contributors' analyses of these works, these performances paint implacable portraits of white-aboriginal relations, plays that are all the more relevant considering that Quebec playwrights have yet to produce some similarly compelling theatre on these same relations. I observe, however, that Marie Clements, a native artist who nevertheless navigates the same waters, receives no mention. Robert Lepage, whose career is also developing in English, merits a well-informed article. In his contribution, A. Dundjerović shows how Lepage uses alter-egos in his solo performances to insert autobiographical elements, mixing the mundane and the mythological to develop the fables he stages, while simultaneously deploying technology inventively. Broadly speaking, I had the impression that the stage aspect was not as well researched as the written forms.

This does not dissuade Jenn Stephenson from noting in the conclusion of her introduction that "the preoccupations of solo performance are with other people, with the basic connections of theatre—the playwright and the performer, the actor and the character, the character and the audience, the individual and her community" (xiii). The assertion is firmly supported in her work. Less apparent, perhaps, is how this concert of marginal voices participates in building the community other than by displaying the differences

at the source of its exclusion. Alan Filewod effectively addresses this issue in an article that might well have been included in this collection; in his 1997 essay, he highlights the paradox that the role of solo performance in the construction of a national identity is virtually ignored.<sup>2</sup> The word “Canada” moreover, does not appear in the title of Stephenson’s work. Still and all, *Solo Performance* contributes, in this regard, many perceptive and enlightening comments on a crucial theatrical phenomenon of our times.

**GINNY RATSOY, ed.**

*Theatre in British Columbia.*

Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English. Vol. 6. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2006. xxxvi + 228 pp.

**ANNE NOTHOE, ed.**

*Theatre in Alberta.*

Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English. Vol. 11. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2008. xxiii + 177 pp.

STEPHEN HEATLEY

These two collections of reprinted essays, arranged chronologically according to their year of writing, present an impressive historical overview of the evolution of theatre and performance in these two outlying provinces. They both successfully follow the directive of general editor, Ric Knowles, that the compilations should “recognize the important critical heritage of scholarly work in the field and attempt to fill in its most significant gaps by highlighting important work from and about marginalized communities” (*Theatre in British Columbia*, iv), and so we hear not only about the work of large companies and dominant communities (particularly noteworthy is Dianne Bessai’s exhaustive article about Edmonton’s—or should I say “Canada’s”—Citadel Theatre and how it inadvertently spawned an alternative theatre movement in Edmonton) but also about work that has broadened the theatrical complexion of each of these provinces, like Vancouver Sath (essay by Uma Parameswaran), which focuses on the theatrical representation of the Southeast Asian populations in British Columbia. The essays take us as far back as the turn of the twentieth century and community theatre activity in Lethbridge, right up to the twenty-first-century projects of David Diamond’s Headlines Theatre Company. The essays are