

**Performing Turtle Island: Indigenous Theatre on the World Stage by Jesse Rae Archibald-Barber, Kathleen Irwin, and Moira J. Day (eds.). 2019. University of Regina Press. Regina, SK. 233pp. ISBN 978-0-8897-7656-2**

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*Performing Turtle Island: Indigenous Theatre on the World Stage* by Jesse Rae Archibald-Barber, Kathleen Irwin, and Moira J. Day (eds.). 2019. University of Regina Press. Regina, SK. 233pp. ISBN 978-0-8897-7656-2

*Performing Turtle Island: Indigenous Theatre on the World Stage* emerged from Performing Turtle Island: Fluid Identities and Community Continuities, a gathering hosted by the University of Regina and the First Nations University of Canada in September of 2015 that explored how Indigenous identity, and Indigenous theatre, are shaping the country's cultural and artistic scenes. This conference also functioned as the Canadian junction of the Performance Studies International's (PSi) 2015 Globally Dispersed Conference, creating opportunity for transcontinental dialogue about "remap[ping] the relations and limits of (un)knowing" (p. xv). *Performing Turtle Island* was shaped by the conversations, performances, and symposiums at this gathering.

Archibald-Barber, Irwin, and Day are experts in the fields of performance, theatre history, and Indigenous literatures in Canada. Dr. Irwin (Scots-Irish-Welsh ancestry) is a theatre artist and scenographer and faculty member in the department of Media, Art, and Performance at the University of Regina. Her practice is rooted in the specificity of place, and historical, psychological, social, and metaphorical meanings that accompany different spaces. A professor of English and Indigenous literatures at the First Nations University of Canada, Dr. Archibald-Barber (Métis, Cree, and Scottish descent) examines the use of storytelling and performance as tools for Indigenous communities to connect to their culture, and for non-Indigenous communities to engage in the process of cultural decolonization in his research. Dr. Day (English, Irish, Scottish lineage) is a professor of Drama at the University of Saskatchewan. Day has widely published and lectured within the field of Canadian theatre – particularly on women and pre-1960 theatre in the prairies. The diverse educational and cultural backgrounds of these three editors provided a rich foundation for the interdisciplinary nature of this collection. With contributions from researchers, teachers, and practitioners of Indigenous theatre and art, *Performing Turtle Island* is a collaborative book that explores a range of pedagogical, theatrical, and ideological strategies for bringing Indigenous performance into conversation with Western theatrical interpretations and practices.

Braiding together warm and engaging essays by authors from various educational, professional, and ethnic backgrounds, including musical composers, theatre directors, dramaturges, and Indigenous performers, *Performing Turtle Island* aims to demonstrate how the act and process of performance functions as a form of self-representation for Indigenous communities. Together, the individuals' writings featured in this collection emphasize the empowerment and self-determination that Indigenous artists, performers, and scholars gain through the acts of remembering, performing, and sharing their Indigeneity on the stage or screen. Primarily calling upon their personal experiences as performers, creators, and students of Indigenous theatre and art in Canada, these writers provide examples of arts-based methods of

destabilizing Western creative practices and schools of theatrical thought in a step to empower and centralize Indigenous performance and voice. Methods used to do so include integrating storytelling and sharing into theatrical pedagogy and training, practicing community-based research, reclaiming canonized play-texts in the English-Canadian theatre, and developing philosophical and pragmatic approaches to land-based dramaturgy and performance. In my opinion, as a whole, *Performing Turtle Island* exceeds its objectives by offering moving personal testimony and community-based examples of artistic and pedagogical practices that aid in developing equitable, decolonial, and Indigenized spaces for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous theatre practitioners and consumers.

The content of *Performing Turtle Island* has been divided into two thematic sections: “Critical Self-Representation in Production and Training,” and “Performance in Dialogue with the Text.” The first section is centred on the process of performing Indigeneity—of embodiment—in various areas of performance, such as in film, history, actor training, language, and education. This section opens with Michael Greyeyes’ essay “Stranger in a Strange Land: Views from an Indigenous Lens,” wherein Greyeyes critiques formulaic representations of Indigenous peoples in film. This, he claims, is a consequence of text-based psychological approaches to acting. He suggests that honing in on the physical, bodily experience of acting can combat this approach, as it goes beyond the imposing linguistic and psychological limits of colonialism. These ideas are later echoed in Carol Greyeyes’ essay titled “Making Our Own Bundle: Philosophical Reflections on Indigenous Theatre Education.” This piece explores embodiment as a decolonizing tool in institutional actor training programs. Carol Greyeyes offers theatrical practitioners and educators’ pedagogical approaches to Indigenize their training, such as engaging in improvisation, using music/sound, developing a democratic training environment, practicing thoughtful listening, and maintaining reciprocal relationships. These two essays, along with those by Armand Garnet Ruffo, Spy Dénommé-Welch and Catherine Magowan, and Annie Smith, reflect on personal experiences of critiquing performance through the lens of Indigenous knowledge systems in an effort to adapt and challenge existing paradigms of performance and theatrical methodologies.

The second section, “Performance in Dialogue with the Text,” is grounded in the problematic and often disjunctive relationship between the play-text and the process of performance. It explores how Western understandings of performance can be subverted, complicated, or entirely transformed through their revitalization and reinterpretation in an Indigenous lens. For example, Yvette Nolan’s essay “A Prayer for Rita Joe” recounts her experience directing a reproduction of *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* at the National Arts Centre in 2009. Her striking piece explores the steps she took to Indigenize the performance by first building on the “non-linear fashion” of the play, which “lend[s] itself to an Indigenous worldview” (p. 118). Through restaging the play’s tragic conclusion, and ultimately freeing Rita Joe from those who harm her by changing the punctuation (and in extension, inflection) of the character’s final line, Nolan demonstrates how canonical Indigenous plays (both in content and authorship) can be radically transformed by placing Indigenous and non-Indigenous views, histories, and aesthetics in dialogue with one another. Similarly, an essay by Jesse Rae Archibald-Barber brings Tomson

Highway's *The Rez Sisters* into dialogue with Western literary theory. "Performing the Bingo Game in Tomson Highway's *The Rez Sisters*" critiques the use of Western aesthetic structures when analyzing Highway's play, a common trend in contemporary literary scholarship. Rather, he suggests that centring one's analysis on Indigenous spirituality and the presence of Trickster figure in the play advances the play's decolonial potential for performers, audiences, and literary teacher/scholars who engage with the play-text. In addition to emphasizing the reclamation of texts, the other essays in this thematic section by Dione Joseph, Kahante Horn-Miller, Megan Davies, and the poem "Red People, Red Magic" by Floyd P. Favel that concludes the collection collectively signal to ways that seemingly static and rigid concepts of "text" and "performance" can be and often are complicated, subverted, or completely abandoned through decolonizing and Indigenizing the text.

While the collection does tend to avoid assigning its contents reconciliatory power, I believe the work have benefitted from more closely engaging with the politics of recognition and the implications of the word "reconciliation." While the editors' introduction calls attention to the problematic nature of the term, citing Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill and Sophie McCall, as a whole the work does not explore the potential for Indigenous theatre—particularly play-texts and productions that are marketed or funded by government organizations and grants—to be used or exploited for reconciliatory ends. Megan Davies' essay briefly addresses this, and the essay by Dénommé-Welch and Magowan creates avenues for this kind of discussion when they make mention of *Going Home Star*, a ballet commissioned Canada's TRC. With the rise of writing on performative allyship and what Megan Davies calls a "consumptive catharsis" (p. 173) by scholars such as Glen Coulthard, Dale Turner, and Eva Mackey, I would have liked to see the editors, if not the contributors, pose questions about the extent to which commissioned productions/revivals of Indigenous theatre illicit a performance of Indigeneity that non-Indigenous audiences will consume without deeply engaging with the presentation to the point of unsettling settler expectations.

With that said, as a Euro-Canadian woman who studies and frequently watches Indigenous and Canadian theatrical works, I found the essays included in this collection enlightening and edifying to read. The interdisciplinary array of studies included in this collection helped me to more deeply understand some of the practices that can and should be used to challenge and expand my interpretation and teaching of Indigenous theatre. Through shifting its interpretive focus towards embodiment, tone, and voice, this collection has encouraged me to re-conceptualize and de-Westernize of my understanding of emerging and seminal Indigenous theatrical works. The editors state in their introduction that this book has an intended audience of undergraduate and graduate students of drama, Indigenous arts, and Canadian studies programs, alongside established Indigenous and settler artists and scholars, all of which I agree with. In addition to those already listed, I also believe that directors of theatrical production companies and executive boards of local and national theatres would benefit from reading *Performing Turtle Island*. With the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, and the highlighting of systemic racism and exclusion that exist even within creative spaces, the ideological work being undertaken in this collection is bound to create self-reflexivity and

a sense of social responsibility amongst its readers. It transcends academic boundaries and disciplines, speaking to anyone who wishes to explore new and constantly changing ways of performing Turtle Island.

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