

Ian Brodie. *A Vulgar Art: A New Approach to Stand-Up Comedy*. (Jackson: 2014, University Press of Mississippi. Pp. 255. ISBN: 978-1-62846-182-4)

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[See table of contents](#)

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more esoteric and academic in nature, and such omissions likely reflect the intended audience for whom the book was written. This criticism, of course, exposes my own biases as an academic.

Overall, I found this to be an enjoyable, well-balanced book. Sparling's writing is clear and direct, making it a book that is useful for scholarly research, as well as being wonderfully accessible to general readers. Well-researched and presented, it fills an important gap in Gaelic and Cape Breton scholarly work.

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Ian Brodie presents the first examination of stand-up comedy through the lens of folklore in *A Vulgar Art: A New Approach to Stand-Up Comedy*. This reviewer was enchanted by Brodie's examination of interpersonal, artistic communication and presentation, but, at the same time, was leery of the obvious reverence that Brodie seemed to hold for comedian Bill Cosby. The timing of the release of this book was unfortunate, as accusations regarding Cosby's exploits were ubiquitous in the news and social media. However, upon further reflection, Brodie's regard for Cosby had very little to do with the man himself and everything to do with his performance as a stand-up comedian, and so I could also dissociate the two faces of the man as featured in the book (past) and in the media (present).

Turning to the title of the book, vulgar means, in its most basic definition, of the people and is absolutely the most effective word for what the book explores although, to be sure, the double entendre is not to be sneezed at in any way. Brodie's examination of the art of stand-up comedy reflects on the entire context, environment, and concerns of performing comedy effectively. His folkloric lens focuses on minute details, such as microphones and clothing, to wider concerns, such as bridging the various elements of intimacy between a performer on the stage and his or

her audience. While Brodie explains many of these concerns to be fairly distinctive in the context of stand-up comedy, there were numerous echoes for the oral storyteller also. This added to my immense delight in reading the book. My copy is profusely cluttered with post-it stickers identifying points for me to adapt and adopt into my storytelling classes and workshops.

Contemporary comedians, as Brodie explains, do something more than tell jokes, but at the same time they must still generate laughter from the audience: “The something they do is observational, by the comedian grounding it in an experiential, proto-ethnographic act; reflective, by endeavoring to interpret that experience; perspectival, by taking a particular position for interpretation; critical, by privileging that position; and, above all, vernacular, by locating it in the local rather than the universal” (13). The fifteen patterns of features of stand-up comedy indicated by Brodie definitely fit this reviewer’s concept of a stand-up comedian, but, at the same time, a professional storyteller with the exception of “deliberately aimed at evoking laughter from the audience to whom it is being performed” (15).

Organized into three overlapping sections, Brodie first discusses the theoretical connections of a folkloric approach to a topic not usually considered folklore before delving into various aspects of stand-up comedianship, ultimately focusing on creating intimacy over distance. He then moves on to an exploration of how stand-up comedy transfers from the person-to-audience’s oral performance on stages of various dimensions and settings to the capture of the voice on audio recordings. By extension, this includes the entire performance on videos, television programs, in print, and on social media, such as YouTube and Twitter. All three sections, further divided into seven chapters, are literally sprinkled with anecdotes, examples of stand-up routines, and all manner of stories. This liberal invocation of story, in all shapes and sizes, made this book an absolute pleasure to read and contemplate.

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