

NAWPA: An Editorial Statement

By Sharon Sullivan

In March 1999, I attended a conference entitled "A Celebration of Native Women Playwrights" at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, the home of the Native American Women Playwrights Archive. The weekend included scholarly papers, performances, and many conversations that were both fruitful and at times, painful. Anyone that has done research in the field of Native women playwrights, or native playwrights in general, knows that there is a dearth of scholarship available on this topic. My unique position as Managing Editor for JDTC offered me the opportunity to create this supplement of articles from the conference participants in the hopes of adding to the available scholarship.

The supplement is divided into three sections. The first two articles are introductions to the conference and the archive. The second section includes papers written by playwrights after the conference for JDTC. The final three articles are the scholarly presentations given at the conference.

Dr. Mimi D'Aponte, editor of the *Seventh Generation: An Anthology of Native American Plays* (TCG, 1999), provided the keynote address for the conference. In her address, she offers a discussion of the frustrating process of searching for Native plays that led to her creation of the anthology. She identifies native women playwrights as transmitters of cultural information, healers of personal and social ills, and transformers of communal experiences.

Rebecca Howard, graduate assistant to the collection, describes the contents of the archive and some common themes found in the collected plays in her article, "The Native American Women Playwrights Archive: Adding Voices." Howard identifies the scripts as woman-centered with four prevalent themes, including the importance of heritage, intergenerational relationships, historical figures and traditional legends, and anthropomorphized animals and spirits that interact with human characters.

I wanted to include the thoughts of some of the women playwrights present at the conference that contributed to the dynamic discussions, but did not give formal lectures. I asked LeAnne Howe to write about her experience of the event. In "Tribalography: The Power of Native Stories" Howe explains the concept of "Tribalography," a term she coined to describe the rhetorical space where healing and transformation through stories may take place, and the concept of the narrative authoring of America. Playwright, Novelist, Poet, Diane Glancy generously allowed me to publish her new article "Further (Farther): Creating a Dialogue to Talk about Native American Plays." Glancy developed this paper from her attendance at several conferences and offers a poetic exploration of developing a Na-

tive literary theory and why it is necessary to the continuation of scholarly understanding of Native literature.

Ann Haugo's essay, "Colonial Audiences and Native Women's Theatre: Viewing Spiderwoman Theatre's Winnetou's Snake Oil Show from Wigwam City," explores native women's performance as colonial intervention requiring the artist and spectator's interaction to construct meaning. Haugo uses the Spiderwoman production and the ensuing audience/performer discussion to illustrate native performance as a site of communication that forces the non-native spectator to recognize their investment in colonial privilege.

Christy Stanlake offers a literary analysis of Yvette Nolan's play *Annie Mae's Movement*. She describes Nolan's use of present time, past time, and "blended time" to tell the story of the life and death of Anna Mae Pictou Aquash. Stanlake argues that Nolan's play, while presenting a biographical story of a single woman, also offers a critique of the obstacles faced by powerful Native women and their isolation from both native and non-native men.

ViBrina Coronado examines the importance of Performance Studies to understand the multiplicity of multi-cultural performance and its implications. Coronado asserts that rather than simply applying traditional Western theatre principles; the spectator must be open to an alternative aesthetic in order to create meaning when viewing Native performance.

Each of these seven articles offers a different perspective on Native Theatre. Together, they make a significant scholarly contribution to a growing field of study. Native writers have been active for hundreds of years. With a few exceptions, Academia has been slow to acknowledge them. I hope that this supplement and the new anthologies that have become available in recent months will change that. As teachers, professionals, students and scholars, we recognize the importance of multiple voices and identities shaping our culture and the value of those voices for both what they reflect to the receiver and the power they give the speaker.