Spring 2011

Review of *Native American Performance and Representation* edited by S. E. Wilmer

T. Christopher Aplin

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly)

Part of the [American Studies Commons](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly), [Cultural History Commons](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly), and the [United States History Commons](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly)


[http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/2680](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/2680)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Great Plains Quarterly* by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Modern Native American artistic performances originated in the widespread North American ceremonial complexes that combined community-based oral tradition and musical practice with the visual performative arts. Growing out of a 2002 “Ritual and Performance” workshop hosted by editor S. E. Wilmer, Native American Performance and Representation illuminates the links that bind American and Canadian Indigenous traditions to their correlate modernities, their diverse ceremonial rituals to expressive artistic performances. This edited volume casts its net broadly, attempting to “review and assess the changing nature of Native performance strategies in a multicultural society.” But it essentially focuses on post-1960s theatrical performances and media representations (film, video, multimedia productions) as a means of
preserving and reasserting community values “amid Eurocentric incursions and globalized lifestyles.”

The book is unified thematically by its emphasis on Indigenous negotiations of the past and present within contemporary creative performances and the way that the pursuit of “authenticity” (a problematic term, no doubt) in those performances articulates modernist anxieties. These themes appear in diverse articles addressing Northwest Coast cultural tourism, popular cultural representations of Indigenous peoples (e.g., Pocahontas), Miqmac oral tradition, colonial violence, theatrical performance and dramaturgy, and multimedia productions. Specific highlights include Daystar/Rosalie Jones's semibiographical account of her movement from the Blackfoot reservation to the formative Institute of American Indian Arts of the 1960s, then to the Juilliard school, and back to the Native community. Julie Pearson-Little Thunder provides a notable essay on the cosmopolitan theatrical experimentations of the Red Earth Performing Arts Company in the 1970s.

Of particular note to readers of this journal are the chapters analyzing Hanay Geiogamah's Body Indian (1972) and William S. Yellow Robe's The Independence of Eddie Rose (1986). Both plays are set in “Indian Territory”: intertribal Southwest Oklahoma and a generic Northern Plains/Plateau Indian reservation, respectively. Jaye Darby's writing on Geiogamah is personal, illuminating, warmly expressed, and informed by many years of work with the Kiowa-Delaware playwright. David Krasner's writing, in contrast, is more academic in approach—it analyzes Yellow Robe's Eddie Rose as an example of a bildungsdráma (or, coming of age story) in a way that foregrounds broad, predominantly Western structural parallels at the modest risk of diminishing the unique, local threads that make Eddie Rose a significant commentary on pan-Indian experiences. Both chapters usefully aid the reader in interpreting the hard moral realities revealed within these tales of corruption and redemption in the Plains.

Performance art and dance each represent “traditional” Indigeneity since they are extensions of ritual ceremonialism. Film, video, and multimedia are themselves logical modern extensions of the oral traditions that transmitted ritual and historical memory within Native communities. But what of the indispensable third leg that forms the foundation of Indigenous ceremonialism: music? The notable absence of even one article dealing with any aspect of Indigenous musicality represents a breach in reportage. “Performance,” as a fundamental concept of the book, in this light remains relatively undefined and undertheorized. Native American Performance and Representation nonetheless provides fascinating insight into the rich arts and artistry of post-'60s Red Power theater, representation, and multimedia arts in Indigenous North America.

T. CHRISTOPHER APLIN
Independent Ethnomusicologist
Pasadena, California