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Review of *Mediation in Contemporary Native American Fiction* By James Ruppert

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Mediation in Contemporary Native American Fiction. By James Ruppert. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995. Notes, works cited, index. xiii + 174 pp. \$29.95 cloth. \$11.95 paper.

James Ruppert discusses works by six Native American writers whom he believes “mediate” Indian and non-Indian world views. He argues convincingly that narratives by N. Scott Momaday, James Welch, Leslie Marmon Silko, Gerald Vizenor, D’Arcy McNickle, and Louise Erdrich are delivered from “an artistic and conceptual standpoint, constantly flexible, which uses the epistemological frameworks of Native American and Western cultural traditions to illuminate and enrich each other.” These texts “create a dynamic that brings differing cultural codes into confluence to reinforce and recreate the structures of human life: the self, community, spirit, and the world we perceive.” Often citing reader-response theorists, Ruppert is particularly interested in how the various novels he discusses manage their audience’s involvement in ways that potentially expand their repertoire of interpretive practices.

Unlike many recent studies of American Indian literature, Ruppert’s book considers in some detail the responses of Native American as well as non-Native readers, the latter often—and unjustifiably—assumed to be the Indian author’s only audience. His remarks on the Native reader are appropriate and should alert other critics to this underdeveloped area of scholarship. Overall, Ruppert’s assessments of a variety of “mediational” texts seem well-reasoned and accurate; however, he often leaves his own reader wanting closer analysis

of textual passages to substantiate and fully elaborate upon his claims. Indeed, Ruppert's tendency to generalize and to argue abstractly constitutes the most pervasive problem in an otherwise rich study. A kindred weakness occurs when he cites literary theorists (such as Wolfgang Iser, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Hayden White) in whose thought his arguments are too loosely grounded. For example, the reader-response analysis that Ruppert conducts calls for fewer casual references to "Iserian" concepts and more engagement (coupled with more in-depth textual analysis) with the intricacies of Iser's specific claims. (Incidentally, had Ruppert developed more of a taste for details, he might have noticed that James Welch's narrator in *Winter in the Blood* is not, in fact, "nameless," but is called "Raymond" at least once midway through the novel.)

Overall, despite a sometimes aggravating level of generalization and a tendency toward some repetition (the result of working through the same thesis with reference to six different writers), Ruppert's study is full of accurate observations and valuable insights; ultimately, it rewards reading by anyone wishing to understand how Native American storytellers-in-writing attempt to reach and transform their projected audiences.

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