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Spring 1998

Review of *Myths and Traditions of the Arikara Indians* By Douglas R. Parks

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Berman, Tressa, "Review of *Myths and Traditions of the Arikara Indians* By Douglas R. Parks" (1998).
Great Plains Quarterly. 1981.

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Myths and Traditions of the Arikara Indians. By Douglas R. Parks. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996. Maps, photographs, table, concordance, bibliography, index. xvii + 405 pp. \$40.00 cloth, \$15.00 paper.

Once again, Douglas Parks has offered an unsurpassed account of Arikara oral traditions

by carefully selecting and elaborating upon his earlier, though less accessible, *Traditional Narratives of the Arikara Indians* (University of Nebraska Press, 1991, in four volumes). Parks's careful English translations of a range of Arikara narratives fulfill the interests of specialists and non-specialists alike through detailed descriptions of both stories and storytellers. Old stories become infused with new life as we learn more about the narrators themselves and the various performative contexts in which stories get told. If this was an attempt on Parks's part to bring the past forward, he clearly succeeds in uncovering some of the "true" meanings of oral history as a remembered, re-told, and continually re-invented tradition.

The book's necessarily lengthy Introduction provides an ethnohistorical component that frames the narratives linguistically, historically, and ethnographically. Its strengths reside in Parks's vast linguistic knowledge, specifically of the Arikara language; its weaknesses stem from his limitations as an ethnographer. While Parks reveals his fieldwork experiences over many decades with commendable candor, his lack of incorporation into the daily rounds of everyday life may have restricted his grasp of key features of cultural transmission—those that transcend language. In this respect, the role of kin as cultural transmitters and the *relationships* of one narrator to another remain obscured. None of this, however, detracts from the unparalleled record these stories provide on their own terms as an interpretive tome of Arikara mythohistory and culture. Surely no outsider will ever come as close as Parks to the kind of cultural intimacy that language unlocks.

The book's second part excerpts from the larger collection of narratives, arranged here by sub-categories, the most extensive of which includes "Narratives of the Past." Although the selection criteria for which stories have been reprinted and why remain unclear, what we learn about the narrators and Parks's relationship to them in the Introduction permits

some speculation. For example, Alfred Morsette was clearly the most prolific storyteller, and one of Parks's closest associates. We expect more from him and we get it. But why are we treated to only one of Ella Waters's renditions ("The Young Woman Who Turned into Stone") when we know that she was "prominent in the Arikara community," having served as an anthropological interpreter and as a member of the Ghost Society in service to her own people? For those, however, who may want a fuller account of the narratives, the concordance following the stories and songs provides an invaluable finding guide.

The beauty of *Myths and Traditions of the Arikara Indians* lies in the way it harmonizes the narratives with biographical insight into their narrators as culture bearers. Providing helpful cross-references between stories and storytellers, Parks clearly notes that "sacred and secular stories form a continuum along which stories cluster . . . [in] a single category: the true story or history." What makes Arikara narratives unique is less the structure of the stories than the cultural meanings that specific characters signify and by whose actions the inter-relatedness of place, kinship, and language converge. By retelling these true stories and tales, this book acknowledges and preserves these relationships.

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