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Review of *The Nature of Native American Poetry* By Norma C. Wilson

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The Nature of Native American Poetry. By Norma C. Wilson. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001. xi + 164 pp. Illustrations, bibliographical references, index. \$34.95 cloth, \$17.95 paper.

For the reader new to the field, perhaps attracted by an encounter with an individual poem or poet, Wilson's book offers genuine insights into the relationship among history, biography, and Native American poetry. Readers more familiar with contemporary Native American poetry will find good thematic readings that fall somewhere between an overview or appreciation on the one hand, and hard academic criticism on the other.

The book's introduction attempts to locate the emergence of Native American poetry in English as an articulation of a special relationship to the land and a partial response to the traumas of Native American history. Unfortunately, Wilson doesn't permit herself the space required to develop these arguments,

nor does she offer even a paragraph describing the vital role played by Joe Bruchac's *Greenfield Review* and Maurice Kenny's Strawberry Press in nurturing the writers whose work is central to her book.

The heart of Wilson's discussion consists of eight chapters on individual poets, all significant figures—Carter Revard, N. Scott Momaday, Simon Ortiz, Lance Henson, Roberta Hill, Linda Hogan, Wendy Rose, and Joy Harjo. Readers of *Great Plains Quarterly* may be especially interested in the work of Revard, Henson, and Hogan, all Oklahoma writers. By and large these chapters are biocritical essays, opening with biographical information before launching into chronological reviews of each writer's publications. Wilson allots several paragraphs to glossing the main themes of each poet's work, supporting her generalizations with fragmentary quotations from individual poems. One longs at times to trade this strategy for sustained close readings of individual poems. Particularly strong are the chapters on Joy Harjo and Lance Henson, the latter a treasure because so little of quality has been written about this important poet. On the other hand, she struggles with Scott Momaday and Carter Revard, in part, I think, because both writers owe so much to Euro-American literary traditions, a debt whose shape and dimensions Wilson does not effectively assess.

The volume concludes with a chapter surveying the work of some younger, lesser known poets, though Wilson never clearly articulates a rationale for why they, or the figures in the main body of her book for that matter, are singled out for attention. The list of references in the back combines literary and critical work, the latter represented only spottily. In the end, however, Wilson delivers what every reader who picks her book up must want it for: an authentic sense of each poet's individual voice.

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