

Hanay Geiogamah. *New Native American Drama: Three Plays*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980) xxiv, 133 pp., \$4.95 paper, \$9.95 cloth.

This collection of plays is significant because it is the first Native American drama written by a Native American. Hanay Geiogamah, a Kiowa Indian, has been actively involved as a playwright (producing these plays in the 1970s), has taught drama at the University of Washington, and has directed Native American theater in recent years (directing his own work, as well as other drama, at the La Mama Experimental Theater in New York and directing the Native American Theater Ensemble). This thin volume, *New Native American Drama: Three Plays*, was readied for publication only after each drama had been performed and sympathetically received by audiences and critics alike. *Body Indian*, *Foghorn*, and *49*, the three plays in this series, represent a new art form for the theater, but the themes implicit in them are timeless, universal concerns for the Native American and for the student of literature. No doubt, the plays make good theater, intriguing and fresh, but they also present provocative, although sometimes disturbing, views of humanity. To gain insight into these themes, however, readers must devote themselves to understanding Geiogamah's characters, his unusual techniques, and his allusions to American Indian tradition. Once these elements are studied, the plays become richly suggestive and powerful.

Body Indian, the first and most widely performed play, reflects Geiogamah's best use of characterization. The most dominating and pervasive character in the play is Bobby Lee, a crippled alcoholic in his thirties, who come to visit Indian friends in a dingy apartment seeking companionship and reassurance for his plans to stop drinking. All of these characters are lethargic, staggering, half-asleep from continual drinking, but they greet Bobby Lee solicitously. The wine is almost gone and they have no money for more, so they are revived somewhat by Bobby's visit. The picture of humanity revealed in this play is alarming, deplorable, and decadent, but the play is not to be misconstrued as a redress of the stereotypic "drunk Indian." Rather, its message is reflected as Bobby Lee's friends fail to give him what he came to them seeking--reassurance, community, and compassion. Geiogamah portrays this character in full contrast to the others. Bobby Lee is a cripple, physically and emotionally; he is seeking help; he acknowledges his dependence on alcohol and his need for others' support if he is to

overcome alcoholism. The others have no apparent handicap but in the course of the play, it becomes clear that Bobby Lee's friends are, indeed, crippled as they abuse and degrade each other and Bobby Lee. There is a hint of naturalism in the play, reflected in these characters' seeming inability to help themselves out of the squalid, despicable conditions of poverty. There is more to the powerful theme of *Body Indian*, and much of it can be seen through character analysis.

The second play, *Foghorn*, does not present dynamic characterizations; rather it is a panoramic view of the various stereotypes Indians have suffered since the arrival of the white man. It is funny but biting satire, revealing clearly that the Indian has known all along the motives of the majority culture concerning himself. Geiogamah instructs, in his Author's Notes to the play, that all the characters in this play are stereotypes pushed to the point of absurdity. The ten skit-like scenes of the play depict the economic, religious, educational, and political exploitation the Indian has endured. There is dramatic irony in the realization that Indians recognize each stereotype for what it is, and although they have suffered gravely from each one, those who have imposed these definitions on Indians have suffered as well. To stage this play, there must be color, merriment and exaggerated props to stress the ludicrous effect of these stereotypes. The most general audience could identify the message in this play because of the mocking dialogue and the familiarity of the issue.

The final play, *49*, is the least accessible of the three because its content is based on an ancient Indian tradition. Its characters are both modern portraits and traditional symbols in Indian culture; therefore, the reader needs to take full advantage of the introductory notes and the author's notes in order to understand the importance of the action. With this historical, traditional symbol of continuity and rejuvenation, the *49*, Geiogamah examines the problematic situation that the contemporary Indian faces in trying to preserve past traditions so that they remain meaningful for the present and for the future. Throughout the three plays, Geiogamah uses his own intimate understanding of the problems of the American Indian to present penetrating and powerful drama. Where needed, his characters are full, techniques are fresh and interesting, and tradition is alive.

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