

## *Explorations in Sights and Sounds*

and the like, whereas the Vietnamese perspective of war was peculiarly silenced.

It was only in documentaries and talk shows that Asians were treated fairly and their problems given a serious look. The steady flow of Asian immigrants since 1965 is building up visible communities. These new Asians who are spreading into enclaves of other ethnic minorities are causing interracial hostility much to the guilt relief for white liberals to know that racism is universal under appropriate social conditions. On the other hand, Asians as strong economic competitors have also renewed the hatred and resentment of white supremacists. In commercial television, however, Asian Americans are still excluded from sharing time as well as playing parts of true self without Euro-American distortion. In the brief but illuminating epilogue, the author makes three suggestions of changing the situation by increasing public-supported independent filmmakers, facilitating their access to commercial media institutions, and accelerating legal-political challenges to discriminatory employment of Asian professional writers in the television industry.

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**Paul G. Zolbrod. *Reading the Voice: Native American Oral Poetry on the Page.* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1995) 146 pp., \$25.00 cloth.**

Paul Zolbrod is known well by scholars of Native American studies for his work on the Navajo and for his commitment to the understanding of Native literature. In this book he takes bold steps to redefine much of what scholars have taken for granted about criticism and definition of the writings and performance literature of Native peoples. He is to be both commended for his approach and questioned.

In challenging the language of contemporary western literary criticism, Zolbrod must use the language that already exists, and herein lies the confusion. Poetry, song, literature, sacred texts, performance—all are incomplete in and of themselves to describe the body of material Zolbrod examines. He begins by stating, "This is a book about poetry" (vii); however, the definition of poetry Zolbrod uses is his own. In the first chapter, he states, "traditional Native American material is not literature strictly speaking." These two statements form the crux of his argument; and the book seeks to explain his meaning and to explicate his new definition of poetry: "I'd define poetry as that art form whose primary medium is language, whether written or spoken (or sung); whether recorded in print, on video or audio tape, or whether packaged in the human memory according to various mnemonic techniques" (7). For

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Zolbrod, the term "poetry" has replaced the more common term "literature." Drawing on Geertz, Luchert, and Derrida, and influenced by Tedlock and Rothenberg, Zolbrod argues the value of Native materials with examples from his long-standing work with Navajo traditions as well as examples from the Iroquois. The story of creation, a ceremonial prayer of thanks, the story of the formation of the Iroquois confederacy, and the condolence ritual all serve to model Zolbrod's central thesis concerning definition of these works as poetry.

Although this book challenges assumptions about literature, and about Native literature in particular, it is less convincing than it might be because Zolbrod relies so heavily on comparisons with Anglo American and European writers. He appears to be still tentative about his conclusions and admits that in his comments about the lyricism of some of the translated work there is really no way to know if the translations mirror the cadence or quality of voice of the original.

In the end, Zolbrod seeks "a system that promises initial simplicity in formulating distinctions and permits comparison and contrast as objectively as possible" (121). He is accurate in stating that many readers and listeners do not understand the relationships between orality and the written word, and he provides a structural paradigm in which the dramatic and narrative intersect with the lyrical and colloquial. The book includes a helpful glossary as well as a substantial bibliography that provide both a context for the discussion and a clear understanding of Zolbrod's use of language and definition.

His argument, finally, is for a recognition of the value of the oral materials that have either been ignored or categorized as "other" in demeaning ways. It remains for others to apply his theoretical construct to additional examples.

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