

William S. Yellow Robe, Jr.

The Life of William Yellow Robe

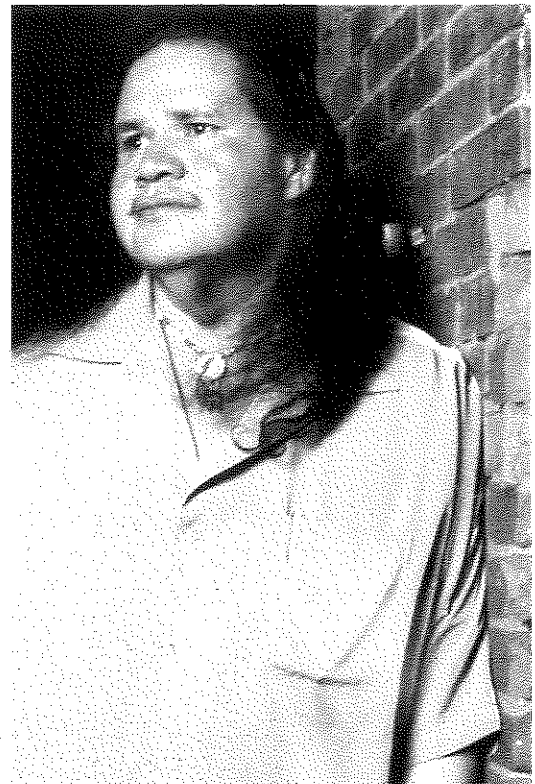
A member of the Assiniboine people most famous for his playwriting, William Yellow Robe was born on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in Montana in 1950. "As a Native kid" it was difficult for Yellow Robe to stay engaged and focused in school, partially because nothing he was taught was relevant to his culture. Many of the plays Yellow Robe wrote were centered around Native Americans and based on things he experienced in his childhood.

His Indian origin contributed to many challenges faced by Yellow Robe because of the misconceptions and stereotypes the people he worked with had about his people. Even so, Yellow Robe is the author of over 40 one-act and full-length plays and was called "one of the great American playwrights" by the Public Theatre in New York.

William Yellow Robe values his culture above all else. This is evident in nearly every one of his works, which convey Native Americans as deep, complex people -- unlike the narrow character archetypes common to many other artists' works -- and do everything from refuting stereotypes to teaching the rest of the world about his culture's beliefs, values, customs, et cetera. [1]

A Communicator?

Through my research, I have come to the conclusion that William Yellow Robe, Jr., is undoubtedly a Communicator. This is evident because the vast majority of his plays were written with the intention of expressing Yellow Robe's culture and their ways, as well as clearing up any stereotypes in place about his people. Yellow Robe is proud of his heritage as part of his identity communicates this value through his plays. For example, in his play *The Star Quilter*, Yellow Robe expresses the importance of star quilts to his people, which most other people, like LuAnne Jorgensen, completely overlook as nothing but an ordinary object. [3] Playwriting is one of the most creative and communicative ways of expressing oneself, and Yellow Robe uses it very effectively in doing just that.



William S. Yellow Robe, Jr. [2]

The Conveyor of Souls: A Monologue

Based upon *The Star Quilter* by William Yellow Robe

(sitting at desk, writing) (looks up, pauses) What? Borrow my pen? Um...no, sorry. (looks at audience again and pauses as though listening) Well, because...this pen and me...we've been through a lot together. This isn't just an ordinary pen. This pen and me have created - and just as easily destroyed - worlds, forged lives and love and loss from nothing but ink and thoughts and dust. (slowly rises from chair as intensity increases) We've vanquished beasts and rescued the innocent and shown people the way from a beginning to an end. We've taken thoughts, translated them into the marvels this society so casually refers to as "words", and shared them with anyone who cares to listen. And to sever the connection between writer and writing, to take a humble friend and turn him into a slave for an unknown master, to borrow my pen, would contradict its sole duty in this unspoken agreement between us. "But it's just a pen!" you say. "It's just a word", "It's just a story", "It's just a pen!" But that it is not. It is my ideas, my thoughts, my imagination, my soul. You cannot borrow my soul; I will not allow you to disrupt the perfect harmony in which the pen and its master work. (sits back down and clears throat) Right. Sorry. No, you can't borrow this pen, but...uh...go ahead and...use this one. (hands other pen to person and continues to write)