



TUDIES

IN

AMERICAN

INDIAN

LITERATURE



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New York NY 10027

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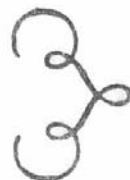


NEWSLETTER

of the

Association For Study

of



AMERICAN INDIAN LITERATURES

With this issue the Newsletter of the Association for the Study of American Indian Literatures takes on an added title, Studies in American Indian Literatures. Like our format, our purpose remains unchanged. As the many plurals in our masthead indicate, we hope to serve all interested (in whatever fashions) in American Indian Literatures of the past and of the present. We shall continue to emphasize reviews (both of current literary works and of critical scholarship) and bibliographical information. As this issue demonstrates, however, we are expanding the range of our coverage as well as its volume. Given this growth and the prospect of continued expansion, it has seemed advisable to establish an editorial board, and the distinguished scholars and writers who have consented to serve are listed below (p. 15).

Even with SAIL above, the Newsletter is not subsidized by any group, institution, or program. Its expenses are met entirely by money sent in by subscribers. This means we are poor but independent; independence enables us to treat fairly and equally all regions, tribes, groups, and programs. The only ax we grind is for the diversity of Native American literary accomplishments.

I was delighted when Karl Kroeber asked me to consider guest editing an issue of the ASAIL Newsletter to deal with the subject of the American Indian in film and the relationship of film to literature. Although we who teach literature may pretend otherwise, many of our students are exposed to American Indian subjects and indeed to the "literature" in films before they read such books as Little Big Man, When the Legends Die, or One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. When we teach the literature we must confront the visual images they have already received. Further, in teaching the literature of the American Indian we must contend with a number of stereotypes of "Indians" that our students have already picked up from Hollywood movies. It is appropriate then to approach the subject of the relationship between film and literature from several directions.

In the interview with N. Scott Momaday the subjects of literature into film and the Hollywood "Indian" are briefly discussed. Although Momaday states he wishes "to be remembered as the man who wrote the novel," students often tend to equate the novel and the film in such a way as to assign authorship of both to the same person. In response to these problems, Terry Wilson summarizes some of the kinds of multi-disciplinary courses which can be taught in American Indian Studies or in an English department which includes the study of film. For further reference, Charles L. P. Silet has prepared a bibliography of materials dealing with the subject of the American Indian in film.

Gretchen Bataille
Department of English
Iowa State University

Interview with N. Scott Momaday

April 11, 1979

In the following interview N. Scott Momaday briefly discusses his reaction to and participation in the preparation of House Made of Dawn as a film. Because Momaday is the only Native American whose primary work has been presented in both the written and visual media, it is useful to examine the relationship between the two forms. There have been other novels made into film and the usual debate about "what has been changed" and the characters not appearing "real" are of course always there. Hollywood has not, however, dealt with the presentation of a major film from a novel by an American Indian with a decidedly Native American worldview. Because Momaday's novel was filmed by a company made of Native Americans and with several American Indian actors participating in the film, the film is a more authentic presentation

The film House Made of Dawn is available from:

New Line Cinema
853 Broadway
New York, NY 10003
800-221-5150 (outside New York)
212-674-7460 (station-to-station collect from New York)

House Made of Dawn is available in both 16mm and 35 mm with special rates for educational purposes.

- Q. Can the visual media communicate the essence of your novel?
- M. I would suspect so. I think that it is possible to make a film that does express the essential character of the novel. It is possible for a film to express the essential character of any novel. The problem is that you can take a novel such as House Made of Dawn and make eight or ten films of it, all valid. It is a matter of picking and choosing.
- Q. What were your initial expectations for the film?
- M. I had no expectations. Of course, I had hopes. I wanted very much for a good film to be made and I was happy with the film that was made. The external photography was good, the way the race and the man running worked as a thread throughout was well done. There were things that disappointed me. The acting was not particularly distinguished, but I'm not sure that distinguished acting was called for in the parts.
- Q. Were you disturbed by the change in time period?
- M. Not really. In order to reflect the time span and the convolutions of time in the film one would have had to make a very long and complicated film. Probably such a film would be tedious.
- Q. In what areas did you make suggestions about the film?
- M. I had something to do with determining where the filming should be done. I was familiar with the landscape of the novel and could be helpful in pointing out various locales. I found out that the writer of a work which is made into a film has very little to do with the filming. It is a mistake to think that the author continues his creative function and carries over his creative work into the film. It is a different thing altogether. I want to be remembered as the man who wrote the novel. I willingly admit that I had very little to do with the film. It is a new creation.
- Q. The only negative comment I have heard about the film House Made of Dawn was about the peyote ceremony. Some felt many in a movie audience wouldn't understand the ceremony and it shouldn't be shown. Those same people were not upset about it in the novel. What can and cannot be communicated in terms of audience?
- M. I would disagree to the extent that the viewing public is more intelligent than Hollywood has ever given it credit for being. Much more important is whether or not it is done imaginatively because the peyote ceremony itself is highly imaginative and very dramatic. It is an artistic consideration more than anything else. There is, however, an area of experience that isn't available to literature. There are ineffable qualities of Indian religious experience; there are sacred areas that are sacred because they are private, and those are unavailable to us. There are always questions of that kind whether you are making films or writing books.
- Q. Do you see a future for American Indian filmmakers or companies or is it too difficult to compete with Hollywood studios?

4. I certainly think there is a future. I think it's more difficult for a company because the competition on that level must be prohibitive. I certainly think that individuals are going to excel. There are a good many Indian people who have talent as filmmakers, who have the kind of imagination and pictorial vision that one needs in order to make a good film.
- Q. Do you believe that if more American Indian people get involved in filmmaking the traditional Hollywood Indian image will change?
- M. I think that is inevitable. I think it's already changed to a remarkable extent and it will continue to change.
- Q. Have recent images of Indians on the screen (A Man Called Horse, Little Big Man, Soldier Blue) been any improvement over the past?
- M. Those you mentioned are probably less an improvement than some others--such as One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. The part that Will Sampson played was a good remove from the traditional stereotyped image. The days of the befeathered Indian chasing John Wayne across the screen are gone, and it's good that they are.
- Q. Did it bother you that in the film version of One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest it was not clear that the story had been narrated by Chief Bronden?
- M. No, it didn't bother me because I thought the film worked. It wasn't the question of giving adequate representation to the Indian voice, it worked the way they did it. Sampson's part was substantial and real.
- Q. There really haven't been many major Indian films in the past few years. Do you feel there is now a reluctance and perhaps a fear about how to portray Indians?
- M. I don't think there is an organizational prejudice by people in Hollywood against Indian films. Their judgment is shaky here and there, but given the right material they'd make the most of it.
- Q. Do you see any potential for Winter in the Blood or Ceremony?
- M. I think there's potential. I don't know if Jim Welch or Leslie Silko have prospects; I think the subject matter is very rich. I think wonderful films can and ought to be made which focus upon the Indian world and Indian experiences. I'm not terribly knowledgeable about filmmaking, but it is a medium which interests me and I think it has great potential. I think we ought to make some good films about Indians. We shouldn't worry about the representation of the cultural realities; that should be secondary to the idea of making an exciting, creative and inspirational film.

TEACHING ABOUT INDIANS AND MOVIES

During the 1978 spring quarter of classes at the University of California in Berkeley, I offered a new course, "The Native American and the Cinema." If that title fails to conjure a specific academic happening, then it was a success. I had purposefully left myself room to experiment with the structure and content of the class. What follows is a brief description of the course, presented not in the spirit of "how-to-do-it", rather as how one instructor did it.

From this self-realization the questions that the class was to ponder for the next several weeks were quickly formulated. If large numbers of the American public could be posited as having received their basic information, or misinformation, about Indians from the cinema, then should it not be incumbent upon the class to learn how accurately Native Americans had been portrayed on the screen? If the search uncovered historical inaccuracies, then the questions of responsibility and motive within the movie industry would have to be contemplated. And what of the actual effects visited on the American public stemming from the Hollywood image of the Indian? After some subtle (?) guidance from the instructor the ancillary interrogatory to the last-mentioned question was raised, "What effect did the movie image of the Indian have on the Native Americans themselves?" What of the attitudes of Indians working in the film industry? All of these historical and social scientific matters could not be analyzed in a vacuum. Questions of artistic license and dramatic necessity would have to be considered. After all, movies are audio-visual renderings of literature and many believe them to have a separate aesthetic all their own. Unsurprisingly, the course proceeded on a decidedly multi-disciplinary note, reflecting the eclectic nature of the subject.

The chronological framework utilized to explore the questions raised above betray the instructor's academic training as an historian. Lectures on Indian history, culture, and value systems were followed by discussions on the social and psychological impact of movies on the American consciousness, literary and historical stereotypes translated to the cinematic medium, the role of Indians in movie-making, and the changing attitudes in Hollywood toward the depiction of Native Americans. To illustrate these and a variety of other topics (as well as preventing a mass exodus of yawning students) representative films from the silent era to the present decade were shown. Guest speakers included Indian actors, actresses, and a Native American filmmaker.

Despite all this academic razzle-dazzle, the most exciting portions of the course came from the students. Callously ignoring the traditional chorus of groans which greeted the initial announcement, I insisted upon a term research paper or presentation as part of the course requirement. The results were worth gloating over. A large number of students chose to conduct investigations of the Indian image and stereotype in movies and the literature from which the latter were made. Others directed their researches into the methodology of adapting novels for the screen; some wrote scripts from Indian novels which have as yet not been used by Hollywood. Five groups of students actually made short documentary films concerning various aspects of present Indian life. Several projects involved taking surveys of public opinion. Probably the outstanding effort of this kind was that of two young women who surveyed the movie-made attitudes of thirty children in a local nursery school.

ure of the course is premature. The class will be offered again: an enrollment in excess of three hundred in these days of declining enrollments ensures a repeat performance. Perhaps the best preliminary measure of such a course's possibilities rests in the reaction of the class to the films shown late in the quarter - the cheers were for the Indians and the boos for the cowboys and savagery.

Terry P. Wilson
Native American Studies
Dept. of Ethnic Studies
U. C., Berkeley

"Indians in the Movies: A Selected Checklist"

The power of the motion picture and later television to shape our perceptions of reality has increased in strength during the course of the century. Examining the cinematic images we have been subjected to and have submitted to can provide us with a valuable and insightful view of how the American peoples have come to view their world. This is no less true for the portrayal of the Native Americans in this culture. Films have proved an impressive tool for the transmission of cultural values and have had a particularly virulent effect on the perpetuation of minority stereotypes. The list of articles below will go a long way toward suggesting the origins and reasons for some of the distortions perpetrated on the Native Americans. I have restricted somewhat this listing to include only the more recent of such pieces in an effort to provide an intensive coverage of the subject within a rather restricted space.

Some of the following annotated listing of articles and books on the image of the Native American in the films was taken from a much larger checklist originally published in The Journal of Popular Film (see Gretchen Bataille and Charles L. P. Silet, "A Checklist of Published Materials on Popular Images of the Indian in the American Film," 5 (1976), 171-82). I would like to thank Michael Marsden, editor of that journal, for his permission to republish the material here. Additional materials will soon be published in that journal. A comprehensive listing of such articles and books will also appear in The Pretend Indians: Images of the Native Americans in the Movies by Gretchen Bataille and Charles L. P. Silet to be published early in 1980 by the Iowa State University Press. I would refer the reader who wishes more information on this subject to consult that forthcoming volume.

Bataille, Gretchen M. and Charles L. P. Silet. "Checklist of published Materials on Popular Images of the Indian in the American Film," The Journal of Popular Film, 5 (1976), 171-182.

A lengthy annotated compilation of books, articles, and reviews which deal with the images of the Native American in films.

Beale, Lewis. "The American Way West," Films and Filming, 18 (April 1972), 24-30.

Criticizes Hollywood's attempt to correct the stereotype of the Indian portrayed in its films which has shifted too far in the other direction showing all Indians to be good and whites to be evil.

- Blakey, Carla M. "The American Indian in Film, Part I," Film News, 27 (September 1970), 6-10.
The first of a two-part series, this article examines several films, mostly documentaries, about Indians.
- Blakey, Carla M. "The American Indian in Film, Part II," Film News, 27 (October 1970), 6-11.
In the second part of the series, Ms. Blakey continues to review films suitable for classroom use.
- Brauer, Ralph and Donna Brauer. The Horse, The Gun, and The Piece of Property: Changing Images of the Western, Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1975.
Includes one chapter on the portrayal of minorities in the television western and underscores the similarity of negative portrayals on television and in the movies.
- Buckley, Peter. Review of Soldier Blue, Films and Filming, 17 (June 1971), 65-66.
Finds that the bloodshed and carnage of this beautifully made film are justified by its moral outrage about the white massacre of Indians. The reviewer found Soldier Blue a powerful and convincing film.
- Calder, Jenni. There Must Be a Lone Ranger, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975.
Calder devotes an entire chapter to the Indian's portrayal in Hollywood movies. Most of her comments refer to films from the 1930's up to the 1970's.
- Cawelti, John G. "Reflections on the New Western Films: The Jewish Cowboy, the Black Avenger, and the Return of the Vanishing American," The University of Chicago Magazine, 65 (January-February, 1973), 35-32.
Cawelti sees the films setting forth a new myth about the west, one which incorporates a contemporary and changing attitude toward the Native American. This new myth amounts to almost a complete reversal of the symbolic meanings ascribed to major groups in the western. The hero is regenerated through his contact with the native inhabitants, the pioneers become the bad guys and the Indians the force for good. The cavalry, a symbol of rescue and law and order, becomes "the instrument of brutal massacre."
- Churchill, Ward, Norbert Hill and Mary Ann Hill. "Media Stereotyping and Native Response: An Historical Overview," The Indian Historian, 11 (December 1973), 45-56, 63.
Contains an historical overview of the stereotypes of the Indian in the American film plus an analysis of similar stereotyping in other media.
- Combs, Richard, "Uzana's Raid," Sight and Sound, 42 (Spring 1973), 115-116.
The story of a renegade Apache who rebels against the monotonous spell of the reservation by going on a senseless rampage of rape, torture and death.
- Erens, Patricia. "Images of Minority and Foreign Groups in American Films: 1958-73," Jump-Cut, 7 (May-July, 1975).
Contains an introductory note to an annotated bibliography of source materials dealing with minority groups in the film. The author makes a convincing argument for studying films as reflectors of national attitudes even in genre films such as the western, which of course involves the Indian.

- Erens, Patricia. "Jeremiah Johnson: The Mountain Man As Modern Hero," Velvet Light Trap, 12 (Spring 1974), 37-39.
Discovers in Jeremiah Johnson an interesting reversal of the usual western prohibition against a white living among the Indians and provides a contemporary, upbeat theme in which the Indian way of life is an important counterculture symbol.
- Ewers, John C. "The Static Images" in Look to the Mountains, edited by Robert Loomis. San Jose: Goshua Publications, 1972, 107-109.
Review of the stereotypes of the American Indian in various media.
- Farber, Stephen. "Short Notices: A Man Called Horse and Flap," Film Quarterly, 24 (Fall 1970), 60-61.
A Man Called Horse is a film with a mixture of terror and wonderment. "From seeing this film, we get some understanding of how New England puritans must have felt on confronting this savage foreign people: so superstitious, provincial, unimaginative European settlers. These fierce, bizarrely painted and costumed natives must indeed have looked like monsters from hell."
- French, Philip. "The Indian in the Western Movie," Art in America, 60 (July-August 1972), 31-38.
This article concentrates on the image of the Indian in films since 1950, the "watershed year" for Western movies.
- French, Philip. "Little Big Man," Sight and Sound, 10 (Spring 1971), 102-103.
In spite of many fine things, including several parodies of famous Westerns, Penn's film tends to dilute the charge against white America by focusing the guilt for the near genocide of the Indian on one crazy individual, George Armstrong Custer.
- Friar, Ralph E. and Natasha A. Friar. The Only Good Indian: The Hollywood Gospel. New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1972.
This book is the most complete study of the Indian in film. The Friars append a lengthy list of films which included Indians as well as lists categorizing the various ways in which Indians functioned in the movies. They also provide several stills and miscellaneous material such as promotional information for the films. They bring in related material such as popular literature, songs, and wild west shows--all of which influenced the portrayal of the Indian in the Hollywood movie.
- Georgakas, Dan. "They Have Not Spoken: American Indians in Film," Film Quarterly, 25 (Spring 1972), 26-32.
Mr. Georgakas takes a serious look at the flaws in A Man Called Horse, Soldier Blue, Little Big Man, and Tell Them Willie Boy is Here.
- Gillett, John. "Cheyenne Autumn," Sight and Sound, 34 (Winter 1964-1965), 36-37.
This positive review discusses Ford's increasing disenchantment towards "the myths he helped to create," but laments Ford's "division of feeling" toward the significance of his statement about Indians in this film.
- Handzo, Stephen. "Film: Soldier Blue," Village Voice, 15 (September 10, 1970), 61.
Handzo notes that: "During periods of national masochism the Indian is rediscovered." He sees Soldier Blue as a "Theater of Cruelty Western based on proto-My Lai."

can Cinema," Indian Historian, 9 (Summer, 1976), 27-29.

This brief article includes the American Indian Movement's list of criticisms about Indian portrayal in Hollywood movies as well as comments about some of the best (Nanook of the North) and the worst (Northwest Passage) of the films made with Indian content.

Hunt, Dennis. "[Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here]," Film Quarterly, 23 (Spring 1970), 60-61.

The film is a "reminder to white Americans that they are bigoted bastards who have been brutally mistreating the Indians; the film is an exercise in white 'self-flagellation!'"

Kael, Pauline. "Americana," New Yorker, 45 (December 27, 1969), 47-50.

Sees Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here as a film full of American self-hatred where the treatment of Indians is used symbolically to an excessive degree to represent American treatment of racial minorities.

Kael, Pauline. "The Current Cinema," The New Yorker, 52 (June 28, 1976), 62.

Describes Robert Altman's film Buffalo Bill and the Indians as about the making of a frontier legend out of the products of a white frontier life of action which produced the stance of Indian life and the story-book icon of Sitting Bull.

Kael, Pauline. "The Current Cinema," New Yorker, 46 (December 26, 1970), 50-52.

Finds Arthur Penn's Little Big Man a film one wants to like but can't because the pieces just do not fit together, partly because it is "messagey" and partly because the slaughter is too reminiscent of Viet Nam. Chief Dan George, "part patriarch, part Jewish mother," doesn't quite come off and neither do the hip comic bits with the Indians.

Kaufmann, Donald L. "The Indian as Media Hand-Me-Down," The Colorado Quarterly, 23 (Spring 1974), 489-504.

Kaufmann traces the use of the Indian figure in colonial literature (drama and novels) through the dime novel and the wild west shows into the movies. He views Indians as a "figment of history always in the making and never coming to an ethnic rest."

Kaufmann, Stanley. "Broken Treaty at Battle Mountain," New Republic, 172 (February 1, 1975), 20.

Kaufmann calls the film "better than documentary . . . on the subject" and praises Joel Freedman's "objective sympathy."

Keneas, Alex. "Indian Pudding," Newsweek, 75 (May 25, 1970), 102, 104.

"From its opening credit of the Smithsonian Institution archives to its extensive use of Sioux dialect, A Man Called Horse boasts an authentic vision of Indian life. Yet for all the tepee truism, its anthropological ancestor is Hollywood, where the Indian, proud but savage, became the *raison d'être* for the cavalry charge."

Keshena, Rita. "The Role of American Indians in Motion Pictures," Indian Culture and Research, 1 (1974), 25-28.

Keshena reviews profit-making and exploitations of the American Indian by the motion picture industry.

Lacey, Richard. "Alternatives to Cinema Rouge," Media and Methods 7 (April 1971) 70-71.

Discusses some of the films which the author believes have portrayed Indian people accurately: The Exiles; Two Rode Together, and The Outsider.

Larkins, Robert. "Hollywood and the Indian," Focus on Film, No. 2 (March-April 1970), 44-53.

Larkins reviews several films with Indian plots which were produced since 1950, concentrating especially on Ford's Westerns.

Mantell, Harold. "Counteracting the Stereotype," American Indian, 5 (Fall 1950), 16-20.

Report of the National Film Committee of the Association of American Indian Affairs. Cites the Committee's input on Broken Arrow as an example of how American Indian consultants can change the Hollywood image.

Marsden, Michael T. and Jack Nachbar. "The Buried Hatchet: Indian Culture in Film as Victim of the Popular Tradition" in Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 7. Washington, D.C.: The Smithsonian Institution, 1977.

Survey of the Indian image in film divided into major periods of the 20th century.

Milne, Tom. "Buffalo Bill and The Indians," Sight and Sound, 45 (Autumn 1975), 114.

Feels Altman has deliberately decentralized any question of the reality of the Indian and film becomes a confrontation of myth against myth.

Morgenstern, Joseph. "Requiem for a Red Man," Newsweek, 74 (December 3, 1969), 121.

The writer-director, Abraham Polansky of Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here, is in search of a "pattern of white America's attitude toward non-white minorities." He focuses on the one incident of the film as a white-Indian paradigm.

Nachbar, Jack. Focus on the Western. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974.

This anthology includes some articles which refer to the image of the American Indian in Hollywood Westerns. Katherine Esselman's article is especially good in that it traces the Indian image from early writings through the visual media.

Nelson, Ralph. "Massacre at Sand Creek," Films and Filming, 16 (March 1976), 26-27.

In this interview Nelson explains that he made Soldier Blue because of the glossing over of the white American genocide of the Indians during the winning of the West.

O'Connor, John E. "A Reaffirmation of American Ideals: Drums Along the Mohawk (1939)," in American History/American Film: Interpreting the Hollywood Image, New York: Frederick Ungar, 1979.

O'Connor compares the novel and the film, stressing the patriotism of the film and discussing the expression of agrarian American life which is "menaced by barbarous Indians."

Pechter, William S. "Altman, Chabrol, and Ray," Commentary, (October 1976), 75-77.

Describes Buffalo Bill and the Indians as a moralizing tale about an American national hero who is a complete fraud, and about the confusion caused by Sitting Bull's appearance. The show business lies prevail in the end, however, as the "venal white devils" trample the noble red men underfoot in the standard American demonology.

Pechter, William S. "Equal Time," Commentary, 51 (April 1971), 80-81.

The author sees Little Big Man as "an Indian-fighting Western with its conventional demonology reversed: bad white men riding against good Indians." Penn does not perceive that the problem is not to reverse demonology but the "demonology itself which brutalizes an audience, and is the enemy of humane feeling."

Motion Pictures," Ethnohistory, 10 (Spring 1973), 103-112.

This article traces the images of Indians from the silent film period (1908-1929) through the negative images of the serials (1930-1947) and the breaking down of stereotypes after 1948. It also discusses the more positive treatment of the Eskimos in documentary movies.

Rice, Susan. ". . . And Afterwards, Take Him To a Movie." Media and Methods, 7 (April 1971), 43-44, 71-72.

Contains a broad survey of the current revisionist films about Indians including Little Big Man, Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here, Soldier Blue, Flap, and The Outsider which she finds variously mindless, embarrassing, and inadequate. She wonders if the first really intelligent film about Indians might not be made by a foreigner.

Schickel, Richard. "Why Indians Can't Be Villains Anymore." New York Times (February 9, 1975), Section 2, pp. 1 and 15.

Schickel uses Ulzana's Raid to explore the use of historical accuracy in portraying the Indian wars and concludes that those films which show brutality and savagism accurately portray the result of a cultural conflict that could never have been settled peacefully.

Silet, Charles L. P. and Gretchen M. Bataille. "The Indian in the Film: A Critical Survey," Quarterly Review of Film Studies, 2 (February 1977), 34-51.

A review of popular images of the American Indian as they've influenced films and film criticism. Includes material from early in the twentieth century up to contemporary reviews.

Spears, Jack. "The Indian on the Screen," Films in Review, 11 (January 1959), 12-13.

Spears discusses the stereotyped Indian villain and the noble savage as well as the over-sympathetic portrayals in films since 1950.

Simon J. Ortiz. A Good Journey. Berkeley: Turtle Island for Netzahualcoytl Historical Soc, 1977 -- Buena Vista Way, CA 94708. illus Aaron Yava. pp. 165. PB \$6.95

Most readers of this Newsletter are probably already familiar with Simon Ortiz's poems. Going for the Rain was published by Harper and Row, and his poems keep turning up in good places. But this does not make it any easier to review them. Rumors and instant admiration are a great disadvantage in such a small new group as the people "studying" (not just "reading" or "hearing") American Indian literature. The year after some books are published they are already the subject of MLA seminars -- as if they were Moby-Dick. Other authors, like Hyemeyohsts Storm, get attacked by a few authorities for misrepresenting tribal ceremonies and cosmology, and their names become almost unmentionable. The smaller and newer the herd, possibly the more easily panicked. So I would like to speak, even if briefly, with all the balance and candor that I can. For much as I like Ortiz's poems, their weaknesses seem to need mention too.

The strengths are a kind of old-fashioned sweetness and decency and goodness expressed sometimes in a fresh, boyish voice, sometimes in energetic outrage. At other moments, even in the same poem, he can be wonderfully witty, simple, and sly -- following both his dog Rex and his traditional teachers coyote and crow. At still other moments, he shows a sense of history which is unique in modern writers, a clear consequence of his Indian-ness. He is trying to locate himself in ancient America, and locate his history in himself, his children, and his people in a way that is very exciting and as exemplary as it is rare.

Here, Ortiz assumes, is Ortiz talking to himself as he gives directions to some girls going to Monument Valley.

I can see it, the red and brown monoliths
reaching for God, the ocean dried up
just a couple million years ago,
the fish are still squiggling in solid rock,
the footprints of gods are still fresh.

And here he is camping with his son in "Grand Canyon Christmas Eve 1969":

My son cries,
I hear him
in the forest.
He's snuggled down
like he was back
on Siberian ice,
the glacial winds howling.

His right and his need for these reflections seem to come from his being a modern Indian. His ancestors are consciously knowing about Siberia and land bridges, he still assumes a racial unconscious. He wants to feel his way into pre-history -- and be familiar with it as "just a couple million years ago."

With coyote he has been on familiar terms all his life, for as he says in the title of one of his coyote poems, "Like myself, the source of these narratives is my home. Sometimes my father tells them, sometimes my mother, sometimes even the storyteller himself tells them." (That, of course, is a "title" only because it is printed in big type; old stories don't really have titles; they have beginnings.) And he uses coyote superbly:

"Are you my friend?" asked Coyote.

"One can't be too choosy," said Crow.

Or the story old "goats" tell of a time when coyote

"brought/ a wheel barrow that was missing only one wheel/
to his auntie he liked and he had a story/ for why the
wheel was missing."

Indeed, Ortiz can be close to many birds and animals, noting relationships other poets might discard as trite or sentimental. Writing "For Our Brothers: Blue Jay, Gold Finch, Flicker, Squirrel," he can curse their deaths from speeding cars "because Gold Finch, goddammit, the same thing is happening to us." And though it may be only an Indian who feels close enough to a Gold Finch to say this, the "us" includes everyone.

So I hope I've explained why I think Ortiz is so good. But he can also be mawkishly sentimental. Several of the poems about or addressed to his children seem sugary-pious. Why print two thousand copies (the size of this edition) of one's family prayers? Is the poet advertising himself or his children? Is the answer to People magazine's celebrity sugarplums to be this "Morning Prayer and Advice for a Rainbowdaughter":

Learn how to make good bread, being careful and patient
in everything you do, feeling your making, being gentle
with the kneading and savoring the result;. . .?
Just as bad, or worse, there are sometimes long stretches
of very flat language, where the whole effort to write in
an available, common idiom becomes self-defeating. The
last poem in the book, "I Tell You Now," is addressed to an
Isleta woman he saw alking in front of a store in Al-
buquerque, the point being that he wishes not to be special
but to address and listen to courageous ordinary Indians.
But I doubt if it succeeds.

The dominant style of contemporary American poetry -- with its constant use of personal experience, its prosy-matter-of-factness interrupted by personally found symbols -- has so far sustained Ortiz very well. Perhaps it has been even more important to him than his Acoma traditions and legends. But I wonder how much longer it will serve. Some modern autobiographical poetry is just stupid. It assumes that anything is interesting just because it happened to a poet and that a poet's or writer's reactions to everything are, per se, worth writing about. This is no more true than assuming that every Isleta woman walking with children is automatically a heroic grandmother. Here the poet's egoism and the bathos of socialist realism are oddly related.

But a poet as witty and promising as Ortiz, with as much true "presence" will surely find the poetic to carry him a lot further. This is only one Good Journey.

Robert F. Sayre University of Iowa

Simon Ortiz. *Going for the Rain*. New York: Harper and Row, 1976. pp. 112. HB \$6.95. PB 2.95

Better than any contemporary poet, Simon Ortiz quietly conveys a sense of living in the American landscape as high adventure. His America is a dangerous world, threatening to the identity of any man, of whole cultures. Travelling through truck gardens where "the lettuce grows in such sterile lines," through cities where apartments need five locks, witnessing to the despair of the Indian alcoholic, Ortiz knows how easy it is to feel all spirit has been leached out of the land and its people. But Ortiz also speaks of an equally real America, still god-haunted and blessed, still rich with life, the country a man may re-discover if he has the strength and the old stories to help him survive.

Going for the Rain is a journey in search of renewal. The section titles set forth its stages: Preparation, Leaving, Returning, The Rain Falls. Preparation means a man considering "all that is special and important to him, his home, his children, his language, the self that he is." Ortiz opens with a terse, brilliant poem recounting the Keres emergence story, the Acoma prototype for all journeys, the story of new-formed innocent creatures passing in confusion through successive worlds:

And later on, they came to light
after many exciting and colorful
and tragic things of adventure;
and this is the life, all these, all these. . .

A note of doubt, important to the whole book, is lightly sounded here. Coyote is telling the story, and he is "b.s.-ing probably." Are we sentimental fools to believe old stories? Finally, Ortiz decides he does believe, and the whole "Preparation" sequence sets forth things he must have faith in if he is to survive a journey away from his own center. The poems speak of reverence for life, as he remembers his father rescuing "tiny alive mice" from a furrow, of sense of self, as he instructs his own children, pointing out their

place on the earth
by old watercourses, in wind,
where your mother walked,
where her mother walked,

of faith in the good persistence of living things, as he awakens to find a pup he thought might die "yapping like the original life/ a whole mystery crying/ for sustenance."

the "leaving" and "returning" sequences are Ortiz's Songs of Experience. A man leaves because "there are things he must go through before he can bring back what he seeks, before he can return to himself." Like Blake, Ortiz knows untested innocence can degenerate into static ignorance; to submit himself to experience may be to reaffirm old values, make them more meaningful. Ortiz must make his own journey through America, act out in his own person the story of emergence, for that story is not something that happened only in a fossil past. As these poems prove, it is always happening.

The knowledge Ortiz wins is mixed. There are light-hearted accounts of lore learned and people met, like the Navajo who cautions against whistling in "the dark horny bear night," for she-bear do that to attract mates. But Ortiz also recounts darker nights in Gallup bars, in airports, in George Wallace country. These poems of "lost life" are moving in their restraint. Ortiz never descends into militant indictments of Amerika-spelled-with-a-k, always accepting responsibility for his own condition: "despair is a miserable excuse/ for emptiness. . ."

Even here, there are affirmations. Ortiz discovers native American culture is far from dying; "You meet Indians everywhere" is his proudest and most repeated line, and the poems abound with encounters with vital Indian people, who, like the yapping pup, endure and flourish. So does Ortiz. He is saved by the things that always save Coyote, his favorite image for himself -- sheer persistence, humor, a long memory for his people's stories, a deep connection with the natural world. On his way to be arraigned in court, he clutches a random pebble, and realizes

it is a fragment
of the earth center
and I know that it is
my redemption. . .

The final poems are affirmations born of hard experience as well as faith. They are about a return to Acoma, to the center of himself, but there is no smug finality about them. When Ortiz says in the last line of the book "it doesn't end," he means not only all life, but his own growing. His ongoing journey after rain. Going for the Rain has the enduring strength and relevance of the old stories; this fine book is the old story of emergence, never finished, always happening.

Patricia Smith

Arthur R. Wright. First Medicine Man: The Tale of Yobaghu-Talyonunh. O. A. Frost, Anchorage Alaska, 1977. illus. Bill Engles. pp. 50, with afterword by Joan E. Weis. \$10.00HB

Wright originally recorded this epic tale of an Alaskan Indian hero in the 1920s and published it in four installments of the Alaskan Churchman. Now it appears as a book, suitably printed and illustrated for children from the sixth grade on, and interesting for adults, since it contains information about Alaskan Indian culture which is difficult to come by.

Arthur Wright (b. 1890) was the son of a gold miner and his Athabascan wife. Brought up in two cultures, he spoke Athabascan and devoted much of his young adult life to interpreting and translating at various Alaska missions of the Episcopal church. The father of seven sons, Wright "became the head of a family prominent in the political, social, and economic development of Alaska," according to the jacket copy. The tale he tells varies among all tribes of Alaska, but the hero, Yobaghu-Talyonunh, is known throughout the region. In a foreword Wright remarks that the story was handed down orally with the object of passing on the customs of the tribes and explanations of many phenomena, but "is hardly known nowadays by the youth of the tribes, who do not have much interest in it." I suspect there is far more interest in it today.

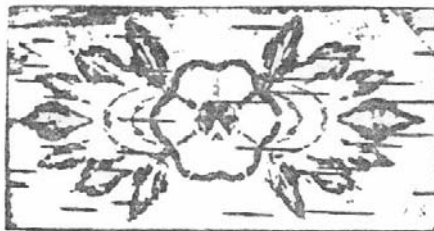
The hero Yobaghu-Talyonunh (pronounced Ya-bog Tal-yawn-a) leaves his home to discover the world in which he lives. On his journey "around the horizon" he meets no human beings but a series of animal collaborators and adversaries. Fourteen brief tales constitute his journey. He outwits the wolves, who "have never since attempted to kill man" (p. 13), and the dreadful Tail-Man whose spirit is said to inhabit a mountain that smokes, shakes and rumbles because of his bad luck at the hands of Yobaghu-Talyonunh. Learning of the value of fish from Fish-Hawk, he begins to learn the power of medicine making. "He believed the animal folk had mysterious power which helped them gain their livelihood. . . Why could not he acquire the same power of willing things to be?" (p. 24)

The center of the epic has to do with the hero's discovery that man's stronger mind could dominate that of the animal people. Animal people begin to show fear of him. His encounter with Wolverine, who alternately helps him and tries to destroy him, illustrates the increasingly ambiguous character of human-animal relations. Yobaghu-Talyonunh is able to outwit the Wolverine but he is unable to catch his daughter. He resorts to a curse: "May you and your children continue to steal men's caches, so that men may hate you and seek your destruction." (p. 28)

Only the Silver-Tip Bear escapes the hero's wrath for all those who kill human beings. This is the most complex of the stories, a pitting of wit, will and strength between two almost equal adversaries. By enlisting the help of the Frog, Fox, and Eagle (whom he convinces never to eat humans again, as well as Mouse and serpent, Yobaghu-Talyonunh narrowly escapes from Silver-Tip. But he does not kill the bear: "to this day. . . Silver-Tip is much dreaded." (p. -9)

Some of the stories, the hero's leaving and homecoming, for example, are very short and anecdotal. Others are more complex and resemble hero stories told by other Native American tribes. In all the language is clear, concise, readable, engaging. There are too few drawings to contribute much, surprise, because all the tales contain sharp visual imagery. But, though few, Engle's pencil drawing are very good. First Medicine Man fits happily with the growing collection of published oral literature. It belongs in any library with a Native American collection.

Pat D'Andrea La Confluencia



We apologize to all who have submitted reviews we have not yet printed: vol 3, no. 4, our special issue on Hanta Yo wrecked our schedule. We'll catch up soon. . . .Particular thanks to Gretchen Bataille for editing so effectively this our first (but not last) section on film. And we're glad to make available to our readers Gretchen's carefully annotated Bibliography on Native American Women: send \$2.00 to the editor and give address to which Bataille bibliography is to be sent. . . .We now also offer a brief annotated bibliography for teachers initiating courses in Native American literatures prepared by Karl Kroeber and LaVonne Ruff. For a copy of this Basic Bibliography send \$1.00 and a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the editor. . . .Several significant publications are scheduled for the next year. Having collected essays for a book entitled Shooting the Problem: Essays on Native American Oral Literatures, with work by Hymes, Kroeber, Huntsman, Ramsey, Lanner, and others, Brian Swann is now gathering material for another book devoted to such topics as neglected or unknown Indian authors, Indian biography and autobiography, use and abuse of Indian material by whites and Indians, essays on and interviews with contemporary writers. All are invited to send work to him, Brian Swann, The Cooper Union, Cooper Square, New York NY 10003 before January 1, 1981. . . .Karl Kroeber's American Indian Literature: Texts and Translations with work by Hymes, Ramsey, Lanner, and Leacock Nebraska does to publish in a year. . . .Socarecrow Press has launched a series of regional tribal bibliographies under the general editorship of Jack Kamen. . . .If we can find a translator we'll publish a brief study of Alexandre Vassilenko of Moscow's Gorky Institute, the first work in Russian on American Indian literature we've encountered. . . .We've recently learned that Beatrice Medicine, Standing Rock Sioux, whose review of Hanta Yo was in our last number, was last August awarded the Honorary Degree of Humane Letters by Northern Michigan University. . . .

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