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STUDIES IN AMERICAN INDIAN LITERATURES
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From the editor:

THE DEATH OF JIM LONEY

For readers of SAIL James Welch is important as the only Native American recently to have published two major novels. But is Welch significant primarily as an ethnic writer? I raise the question because the commitment of SAIL is to American Indian Literatures, contemporary and traditional, as deserving attention both for articulating values and desires of peoples too long disregarded and persecuted and as -- at its best -- qualitatively equal to any other. As Editor of SAIL I have wished to foster writers unfairly neglected and with too little access to the public market for poetry and fiction -- but without compromising the highest standards of aesthetic judgment. For in art all that counts, finally, is excellence. So I introduce three fine essays on The Death of Jim Loney with four comments on the possible import for American literature of Welch's Indian focus.

His novels are relentlessly bleak. Their savage austerity records conditions Welch has known in Montana but is also symptomatic of his profound Indianness. The locale of the novels seems to me more than realistic setting: it is the bitter soil of cultural tragedy. Welch depicts place and society in which only the barest survival of his people is possible, where "Indianness" has had little popularity. In Havre there are no sympathetically curious tourist crowds with Anglo customers for "native" artifacts. The grim sparseness of Jim Loney expresses the central experience of American Indian peoples as harshly tragic.

As the only true natives of our continent, Indians were ineligible for the Americanizing process, a point that seizes one's attention when one compares "Indian" to "immigrant" fiction. If one juxtaposes Welch's novels to those of our most distinguished contemporary Jewish writers, for example, one must be struck by the factitiousness of the problems posed by the more celebrated authors. Eastern Establishment reviewers are naturally more comfortable with familiar problems of acculturation. Welch's fiction causes discomfort because it exposes the repression inherent in the acculturating process, the denial of the existence of a competing native culture. But Americanizing has been both assimilative and destructive. So that Portnoy complains while Loney dies illustrates why the Native American novelist may be the more interestingly American writer.

It has been observed that inevitably the impact of Western culture on Native American ones is more immediately devastating to men than to women. Perhaps this why Indian writers have tended to focus on the central male experience of our century everywhere -- military service. It is difficult to think of a protagonist of a Native American novel who is not a veteran -- Jim Loney is one. But Welch to an unusual degree absorbs the special Indian experience into a deeper vision of masculine ravaging in modern times. It is Welch's sensitivity to male suffering that makes his succinct portrayals of Loney's relations, or failures to relate, to his sister, his white lover, his "mothers" so extraordinarily resonant.

But to me the most intriguing feature of The Death of Jim Loney is its style. Welch belongs to the realist tradition, representing in simple sentences relatively commonplace experience "objectively." Like Ivan Ilych's, Jim Loney's life is most simple and ordinary and therefore terrible. Welch is not an "experimental" writer. The self-conscious art that assures the reader he is engaged only in an aesthetic experience, fiction flaunting its fictionality, is not for Welch. The manner of Loney's death, as Kay Sands observes, realizes a Gros Ventre cultural pattern, but the Indianness of the solution is not advertised. That Loney's suicide fulfills a special mode of valuing human dignity is not allowed to diminish the novel's cruel affect. As Welch does not mitigate the ferocity of circumstance by the refuge of aesthetic form, so he does not grant us the safety of interpretive distance.

James Welch is unlikely to become a popular writer acclaimed in critical journals with large circulations. But I urge that there is no other American writer more deserving of intelligent encouragement and resp

THE DEATH OF JIM LONEY As a Half-Breed's Tragedy

Sometimes it's a drunken car collision, sometimes a violent barroom brawl, sometimes a hunting accident. Whatever the means, the number of self-induced deaths on reservations is phenomenally large.

That James Welch has chosen to write about such violent self-induced death in The Death of Jim Loney (Harper and Row, NY, 1979) is not surprising. But that he has written about it in such a positive manner is not only surprising, it is disconcerting. It is not as if Jim Loney sacrificed himself for some cause or purpose. It is more as if he had simply thrown his life away with intense, singleminded purposelessness. When he returns to the womb of Mission Canyon and invites death, we accept the inevitability of his action, and find it uplifting, even sanctifying, but we cannot say why. Wherein lies the positive nature of Jim Loney's death?

Is it that he has made a decision and faces his responsibility for himself and his world? Or is it that confronting the emptiness of his life compels him to choose death? Or is his death uplifting because it is a sacrifice? How can any of these alternatives work when Loney's goal throughout seems to be nothing but death? Is it that an existential hero has finally been able to act? He has made an ethical choice and how must face its consequences. Perhaps he has performed Kierkegaard's leap but has faltered just short of the faith that would then be his obligation. At what cost? He destroys his sister's Kate's hope for him. He destroys his girlfriend Rhea's love for him. He even destroys the innocent dupe Pretty Weasel, whose only sin lies in succumbing to the blandishment of wealth offered by the White world. If his act were an act of existential fulfillment, were the choice he makes made in a state of freedom, we would not be moved by his death -- we would be sickened, as if Abraham had plunged his knife into Isaac's groin. We would not be uplifted, but would cringe at gratuitous destructiveness.

Is the fulfillment we feel from the novel akin to the catharsis we find from tragedy. The consecrating texture of Loney's actions and his death perhaps give us this feeling, but is the novel tragedy? What choice had Loney that left him inevitably doomed? What riddle of the Sphinx has he answered that he must seek his own destruction?

The flawed choice he has made is to go with the White world and seek his satisfactions within it. The flaw in Jim Loney, as in any Indian male who chooses to live exclusively in the White world, lies in the White culture itself, with its shallow promises of unfulfilling love (Rhea), its fragmented family structure, its empty blandishments of satisfaction through education (Kate), its hollow gratifications in Catholicism, odd-jobs, drink, and basketball, the rage on every reservation.

In Pretty Weasel, however, Loney finds someone who has shunned the superficial satisfactions and has "made it," as a White man makes it, in business. White background leaves both Pretty Weasel and Loney unprepared to face the power of traditional Indian culture as represented by the medicine of the bear. Like the White man he has become, Pretty Weasel immediately sets out to kill the bear. Loney is blinded by the sun and snow which dominate the scene, recalling the revelation of his dead friend Yellow Eyes, who had told him his Indian mother was still in Harlem, still within reach. But "he had never sought out his mother." Failing to look for her, he had made his fatal choice to give up his Indian heritage. If now he has started to question that choice, "he had lost forever the secret of survival." The power of the bear medicine overwhelms him with what he has lost, not father, nor family, nor even mother, but the whole of his Indian heritage.

Pretty Weasel and Loney represent the dilemma facing the Indian male. Either abandon Indian heritage and try to make it in the White world, thus to be cut off from the life-granting Indian culture, or give up one's White-world identity hoping to find oneself somewhere in Indian traditions.

In Winter in the Blood Welch explored the latter possibility. His unnamed protagonist eventually finds a pattern for his life in the traditional history of his Indian ancestors related to him by a blind Indian shaman. Jim Loney makes the other choice. His Indian heritage, like his mother, has become too remote to provide more than an intuition of what he has lost. Yet White culture has nothing to offer an Indian unless, like Kate or Pretty Weasel, he alters his deepest values.

For Loney, who has integrity and independence of judgment, there is as little hope of sustenance from White culture as from the recorded message of his sister's telephone answering device. White culture invites superficially, gives surface satisfaction, but is as empty as death. Jim Loney's choice of the White world is his tragic flaw, and he must face the self-destruction the choice entails. His death is sanctifying because it is a sacrifice to understanding. Winter in the Blood is James Welch's Indian novel, The Death of Jim Loney his half-breed novel.

(Dedicated to the memory of a friend, Robert Archambault, 31, Viet Nam veteran, a Gros Ventre from Fort Belknap, who died recently in a head-on collision with six others in which, according to the Montana Highway Patrol, "high speed and excessive drinking were involved." He also made his choice.)

William W. Thackeray -Northern Montana College -- Havre, Montana

James Welch's THE DEATH OF JIM LONEY

Without particularly wanting to, I found myself, on first reading The Death of Jim Loney, often pausing to remember how Winter in the Blood paralleled the second novel. Déjà vu set in: the protagonist was, again, an alienated Native American trying to find his cultural and psychical bearings on the high plains of Montana. The families in both stories seem to offer fulfillment in and yet seem to thwart his quest for identity. Both protagonists have desultory affairs with women, and both seem to have little capacity for joy in bleak lives often anesthetized by alcohol. Both novels vividly and honestly describe the lives of small town America, of small time Americans living in their particular purgatories. The Montana landscape is, after all, the landscape of the human spirit, and while no one would doubt that the author was a Native American, these novels ultimately should not be thought of as Native American novels. In short, the differences between the two novels were not immediately apparent to me, and I carelessly extended the parallels to anticipate a similar conclusion to the later work, preconceiving the death of the protagonist as metaphoric, thinking he, like the narrator of Winter would shed an old skin, an old self.

But the differences are profound, and they prepare for the classical force of the ending of Loney in which the protagonist is slain. For one thing, though both could say "I felt no hatred, no love, no guilt, no conscience, nothing but a distance that had grown through the years" (Winter, Bantam ed., p. 4), the protagonist of Winter is not so far gone, is more energetic, and turns out to be luckier in his quest for identity. Minimal differences in setting are significant. At the beginning of Winter the protagonist returns to his family's ranch from a spree in town, and he is in some touch with the land. He knows the birds on it by sight and sound, and he lives on it with a family. At the beginning of Loney the protagonist has just stopped working on the land. He is less restless, but only takes initiative in reaction. Loney ends in winter, in physical and spiritual torpor, whereas the winter of the first novel is finally cleansed from the blood, and the novel ends in the return of the birds, the fish, sweet-smelling alfalfa.

Winter is a first-person narrative, affording the reader a more intimate understanding of the protagonist than that provided by the limited omniscience of the narrator of Loney. Jim Loney is, perhaps, a kind of failed "central intelligence." At the beginning we see through his eyes the muddy football game he is watching, get inside

his mind to overhear what he is thinking, though he doesn't really think much. The biblical passage "he thought of" as he watches the game comes out of some cranny of his mind, detritus or amulet from his past, something he cannot consciously explain to himself, but which for us foreshadows the dénouement. Later in the novel we are often reminded of his desire to think, as if his mind can unravel the puzzles of existence "He needed to think. He wasn't ready to do anything but sit on his step and think" (Perennial Library Edition, p. 48). But instead of thinking about fleeing his past to a new life in Seattle with Rhea, he watches his neighbor hang laundry and thinks "of the blue veins on the back of her legs." His thinking is imagistic, feeling more than rationalistic. He admires his dog Swipse who is not tormented by thought or the past but lives an instinctual existence. We also feel through his antennae as he metaphysically feels his thoughts, as at the end of the first section of the novel when he glances at the other onlookers, not like him under existential novocaine but painfully and absurdly hurt by a one-point loss of a football game: "Loney glanced at Harve, but Harve had one big farmer's hand covering his face. He hadn't seen a thing. He looked like a man at a funeral." (p.2) This presents us with Loney's observations but from a third-person point of view that wonderfully understates the irony and foreshadows absurdities to come, including a real death that will not be mourned as is the football loss. Loney seems to feel nothing here, yet perhaps the game recalls his own youth when he seemed to know more, who he was and where he was going, because then he had glory and and identity, like Updike's Rabbit, as a basketball star.

The roving narration occasionally affords us glimpses of the protagonist from other points of view, as when an Indian bartender whom Loney has known for a long time thinks that "He had never liked him and he could not say why." (p.5) That early riddle is paralleled by Rhea's attraction to Loney -- she likes him without knowing why. The dislike Loney generates is perhaps caused by his role as a peripatetic memento mori: society stinks but it is only Loney (the Lone Rager, the bartender calls him) whose nose is out of joint. To the outsider Rhea, he is at once both the cultural waif she can adopt and mother, and the estranged epitome of a romantic lost race and lost cause, her tie to an instinctual arcadia. Here is the one other point of view, besides Loney's itself, that receives more than brief space, but each of the others serves to surround Loney with perspectives, no one being right about him, but each giving a reference that adds up for the assimilating mind of the reader.

"Reality" is not simple or singular, and its meaning radiates to us trying to surround it and pin it down. Although in the hot act of reading we may hardly be aware of the technical device of point of view, it is, I think, well chosen and executed. Perceptions surround the lone man -- sister's, lover's, father's, friends' -- but he is ultimately unknown, even as he reaches some weird (strange, unholy yet wholly) self-understanding. He had not misremembered the verse from the Bible -- "Turn away from man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he, Isaiah 2:22 -- and its context, the coming of the Lord to the Jews and subsequent peace and justice, means that he, too, must turn from man to God. The action of the novel consists of this turning, but Loney has no god to turn to, to save him. As with Rhea's home place, his place (in this story full of references to sense of place) "wasn't the end of the world. . . but you could see it from here." (p. 11)

Another quotation of importance is the epigraph from Malcolm Lowry: the world is neither simple nor peaceful; love and horses and song are not easy to come by, yet they are possibilities. They are, in spite of Loney's death, the reasons for the novel, as they are, I think, for almost everything James Welch writes.

In spite of his confused rage and desire for oblivion, Loney has the courage to see and accept his fate. Why? To be rid of the stupidity of life, mere existence in which a second-string player becomes his executioner, in which a losing lover-cop hopes to supplant him. Martyred for what? Another man done gone. But for a short novel, the texture is rich, like a poem's. The themes of guilt and isolation, of desire for understanding and union are unifying. Many of the minor characters function thematically as surrogates for Loney's parents and sister, or reverse images of them. The only loose end I perceive is the subplot focusing on Painter Barthelme, the policeman displaced (ironically) from the Golden State of California to Montana. His longings parallel those of other characters, but his lust for Rhea leads us to expect some tie-in at the end of the novel. But two "devices" more than compensate the use of varying levels of consciousness, including dreams and visions, and the totemistic use of animals. These enrichments are native, absorbed from the soil, the place, the people there. Terrain is what we have in the dreaming part of the mind, as Hemingway thought, and that land is peopled with other than the two-leggeds who seem forever bent on holding winter in their blood.

Robert W. Lewis University of North Dakota

THE DEATH OF JIM LONEY: Indian or Not?

In many ways James Welch's second novel, The Death of Jim Loney, is clear-cut and straightforward, a narrative of alienation, progressive isolation, and death. Were it not a novel by an American Indian author, with a protagonist who is Gros Ventre half-breed, it might be adequate to characterize this as another in the growing numbers of alienation novels. Too simple. This is an unsettling yet strangely satisfying novel filled with ambiguity intensified by the complication of its none-too-apparent Indianness. But an Indian novel it definitely is, and examining the text as a work of Indian literature reveals why this dark ironic novel is ultimately consoling.

The usual way to prove a novel is Indian and to use the evidence as a critical tool is to point to an Indian author and analyze the ethnographic authenticity of customs and life ways in the work, point to influences of the oral tradition, concern with the landscape, and the collapse of sequential time. But with Loney such approaches are only partially successful. What little obvious ethnography appears is incidental -- identification of tribe, a few tribal names, tribal cops, the reservation agency, vague references to ancient Indians fighting, gathering chokecherries in a particular spot, petroglyphs, but no ceremonies or traditional practices. Loney is too detached from his traditions to know, rediscover, or consciously utilize traditions. The landscape is no more useful. True, Loney is attached to the landscape. He can't leave it for "the good life" his sister Kate promises him in Washington, D.C., and even though he knows his lover Rhea's plan to go to Seattle could be a way out of his malaise, he can't take it, but not because he feels real affection for the land. He's indifferent to most of it and doesn't much like the butte that is the central focus of place in the novel, fears the sense of "lives" he feels out there -- he just can't conceive of a life in the East, or in Seattle, or life anywhere. As in other Indian fiction, a sense of place is well developed, but for Loney the landscape isn't a potent force and not a healing one. He resists it, feels the "dim walls watching him." (Harper and Row edition, p. 89) The petroglyphs are dark, undecipherable omens that make him uneasy. The only way he can claim the landscape is in terms of death: "Once in a while I look around and see things familiar and I think I will die here. It's my country then." (p. 107)

Is this alienation from the land a crisis of spirit similar to Tayo's in Ceremony or Abel's in House Made of Dawn? No. Loney has never had the traditional view of the land those protagonists can rediscover. Abandoned by his Gros Ventre mother when a year old and raised by his embittered non-Indian father for ten years, then abandoned again, this time to his father's mistress, Loney has no grounding in the stories or traditions that animate landscape. He feels the forces of the butte; his intuitions are sound, but he has no way to interpret the significance of either. Not until very near the end of the novel does he know anything of his mother, and he never learns any details of her past or of tribal traditions. She visits him in dreams -- like the petroglyphs, she is an omen but undecipherable. Only when he finally confronts his father and forces recognition as his son does he get some answers to the questions about her that haunt his dreams, but even then the story is brief, only partly true, and he recognizes his father's lie. The oral tradition has ceased to flow and nurture. Unlike the protagonist in Welch's first novel, there can be no sudden understanding -- isolation is finalized in Loney's father's lie: acknowledged as a son, he is orphaned again.

So what we might expect to contribute to some unraveling of the novel's landscape, oral traditions, Indian customs and life ways, in Welch's hands are ironic or defeating. When Loney reluctantly accompanies his old basketball teammate Pretty Weasel on a hunting expedition, there is at least mild anticipation that he may get in touch with traditions and the land and solve his isolation through symbolic quest -- it worked for Tayo in Ceremony but he was prepared. But Loney's trip goes suddenly awry. No birds, no deer -- a bear where there could be no bears. Then the fatal accident that Loney suspects is not accidental. He has shot, not the bear, but Pretty Weasel and sealed his own death in a moment that seems outside time or place. The hunt is reversed and Loney is now the hunted. He considers escape to Canada but rejects that. This is the country in which he will die. The situation, while unsought, is inevitable, a crisis effected by the accumulation of wrong moves and indecision.

Throughout the novel Loney fears life, fears pleasure, love, new experiences. Rhea and Kate both think of him as scaring off easily (p.44). For Loney, reality is not a comfortable place, the present not a comfortable time. He thinks of himself as ineffective and behaves inappropriately: in not confronting his father sooner, in not fulfilling his sister's expectations, in not returning Rhea's love better, in not eating, in drinking too much, in brooding and isolating himself. He knows he does not live even adequately. When Rhea envies him mildly for being able to choose between two sets of ancestors (p. 14), he wishes he were one or the other, not both, as if that would solve his sense of disconnectedness. But the disconnection is not just from the past, it is from the present. His dog dies; his sister finally gives up on him; his lover resolves to leave for warmer territory; his father doesn't even feel guilty about rejecting him. In the disconnectedness, there is some sense of time collapse. The novel covers little more than a month, but it pulls the distant past strongly into the sequence of rather inconsequential events that leads up to the shooting in the cattails. There is a correspondent deterioration of reality and inclination toward waking dreams. It is the slow accumulation of events, both from the present and the past, that though apparently disconnected, as Welch presents them episodically and increasingly interentangled, effects Loney's removal from life. Present and past tangle but do not integrate. Time collapses but it does not merge in any sort of "Indian" way.

Are Loney's alienation and death a sort of dirge for the half-breed who can't determine his own identity and thus fails the world and himself? Hardly. Welch is too intelligent and subtle to opt for such simplistic schmaltz, the novel too serious to be a kind of dark joke. For Loney,

life is a puzzle. If he could just understand his visions, his dreams, the petroglyphs, perhaps he could make sense of his life, begin to live it. For the reader it is a puzzle too. In a sense all the episodic incidents of the novel do merge -- toward death. The novel opens with a biblical quotation: "Turn away from man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he?" And in moments Loney does turn away from the football players with their breath steaming into the night air. Even before the beginning of the novel, however, Loney has turned away from life: in the narrative we see only a small, though intense, portion of his withdrawal. We see that relations with people are incidental, accidental, fleeting; we suspect they always have been. Even when he is with Kate or Rhea he is aware of the futility of his relationship, as though he were grieving over a loss in advance. It is not an unmotivated response; he has already lost his parents, his "aunt," his sense of a past. He seems a man in mourning for his own inability to engage, to live, a man mourning his own death. In his dream of his mother, she is searching for her son in a graveyard. She knows he is not there, not yet, but out in the mountains, but still she searches and grieves over his loss. (p.33) The dream is Loney's imaginative projection, the mourning mother his invention. If there is truth in dreams, he is dead to himself. Is it any wonder he is so detached from life?

At one point Loney weeps for himself as though in mourning. In a kind of drunken stupor he "sees" the people most important to him viewing him from outside his window. He stands with them observing his own tears and explains to them that he weeps because he has no family, "no one". (p.2) The explanation of the novel and projection of ensuing action, down to the shotgun his father eventually gives him, is contained in this vision, and in the recurring vision of the bird that alternates between graceful and awkward movement, as Loney does, perhaps representing his desire to be free of life's burdens and soar to a spirit world. From somewhere deep within his imagination, Loney uncovers the truth in his dreams and lives out his deepest insights. If such an "intuitive" interpretation sounds naïf and like a rehash of cheap romanticism about Indians, it's not. The importance of dreams and visions and their form as presented in the novel draw support from tradition. For the Gros Ventre seeking for direction in life through vision was not a boyhood endeavor but an ordeal taken on in full manhood (Loney is in his mid-thirties). The seeker fasted, cried profusely, and saw spirits in waking visions as well as dreams, spirits that appeared as real people. Like Loney, the seeker "cried incessantly until he was exhausted and fell asleep." (1) If this is not an ethnographic detail one expects to find in an Indian novel, Welch undeniably has struck upon an imaginative moment that rings psychologically true. He appears uninterested in obvious aspects of ethnographic accuracy but specially sensitive to actions that relate to tribal character. Loney has no awareness of how Indian he is in his window hallucination or in his bird visions, but the reader, even without ethnographic information, senses that Loney's puzzling intuitions are essentially from his Indian nature, and Loney himself recognizes this when he feels that understanding them will somehow allow him to comprehend that part of his past connected to his mother.

Well before Loney kills Pretty Weasel and the pace of his doom accelerates, events in the novel tell us his death is a foregone conclusion and if this were simply a novel of alienation we might concede his death is meaningless, a predictable acting out of despair, a dark ending for a dark narrative. But the conclusion is not empty. It is in the conclusion that Loney finally takes control, makes decisions, behaves deliberately and effectively. He carefully chooses the time and place of his death despite his vulnerability and confusion. He ties up the loose ends of his life by confronting his father, spending a few loving hours with Rhea and resolving the dream of his mother by confirming to himself that his

death will be a beginning free from the pain of the past. This deliberateness, of course, indicates that Loney's death is a form of suicide toward which he has been moving steadily throughout the novel, not the kind of mindless accident/suicide that Yellow Eyes, his mother's stepson, underwent, struck down by a train and barely mentioned in the papers, but an honorable act that faces the impossibility of achieving connectedness in life. As Loney leaves Rhea's apartment, he sets out like a Gros Ventre warrior, on foot and carrying the few supplies he will need⁽²⁾ -- a gun and whiskey to warm him. He has already announced his intention publicly by telling his father his destination, confident the old man will give the information to the authorities. Again, Gros Ventre custom is adhered to: "it was customary for a man who had something discreditable to account for to publicly announce that he was about to die."⁽³⁾ As he progresses toward the butte to take his stand, he moves from fear and disorientation to a kind of trance-like state, partly caused by the cold and exertion and liquor. This, too, is in keeping with a state of mind recorded in Gros Ventre warriors: "even the bravest of men might experience acute fear. . . their minds seemed not quite clear. . . the effect was similar to drinking too much whiskey."⁽⁴⁾ As the novel moves toward conclusion, the ambiguity and disconnectedness of the body of the narrative is resolved, each character and incomplete episode addressed and satisfied, so that when Loney reaches the butte he is truly isolated and everything converges on his death. But what does his death signify?

Loney's solitary stand is not ritually symbolic, a futile "statement" about Indian self-destructiveness. His death is simply what it appears to be, the best answer to an insoluble dilemma, an honorable act which will eradicate the past and fulfill his yearning to be relieved of life. He has already mourned his death sufficiently, and the loss of everyone of importance to him, and that grief motivates his final demand that death come to him. He does not seek it; he waits for it to arrive. In traditional times, "men who were grieving over the loss of loved ones were believed to have been especially prone to this indirect method of suicide," and "the most daring men in battle were said to have been those who wished to die."⁽⁵⁾ Like an ancient warrior, Loney takes a position from which there is no retreat, and waits for the attack, even taunting the enemy and revealing his position. Any other action (flight, submission to prison) would be dishonorable and unacceptable. Though he can't live well ("he couldn't think of a way in the world to be good enough," p. 37, italics added), he can die well. For months, actually for thirty-four years, life has been running out for Loney, so it is appropriate that he precipitates his own death, and that the novel ends as he watches his blood run down his arm and drip onto the earth.

Elements of ambiguity in the novel seem effectively resolved in the end, not glibly through use of formulaic patterns, but through a persuasive psychological reality that rings true to the Indian aspect of Loney's personality and circumstance, and is recognizably grounded in elements of tradition and supported by controlled and rather delicate infusions of qualities usually associated with Indian literature. The relation of this novel to the canon of Indian fiction is perhaps less obvious than we have come to expect. It makes no confirmation of survival, provides no way to heal. It is a very terminal novel. If there is renewal, it is solely spiritual, the soaring of the spirit/bird, a final ambiguity in a complex work. Loney is undeniably a novel of alienation, but not a novel of emptiness or despair. Loney's death is not a futile act of annihilation but an appropriate and satisfying conclusion to a painful and solitary detachment from life. In this novel Welch has perhaps expanded American Indian fiction.

1) Alfred Kroeber, Ethnology of the Gros Ventre, Anthropological Papers of the Amer. Museum of Natural History (NY, 1908), 221-222. 2) Kroeber, p. 190.

3) Regina Flannery, The Gros Ventre of Montana, Catholic University of America Anthropological Series, 15, pt. 2 (Washington, D.C., 1953), p. 92.

4) Flannery, p. 106. 5) Flannery, p. 107.

(The following essay is a modified version of the introduction to SMOOTHING THE GROUND: ESSAYS ON NATIVE AMERICAN ORAL LITERATURE, to be published this fall by The Cooper Union, by the book's editor, Professor Brian Swann.)

The languages of North America were, and are, various and diverse. Each, in prayer, story, speech, or song, made the Word central in its culture. ¹ John Stands in Timber describes the sacredness of the word among the Cheyenne thus:

An old storyteller would smooth the ground in front of him with his hand and make two marks in it with his right thumb, two with his left, and a double mark with both thumbs together. Then he would rub his hands, and pass his right hand up his right leg to his waist, and touch his left hand and pass it on up his right arm to his breast. He did the same thing with his left and right hands going up the other side. Then he touched the marks on the ground with both hands and rubbed them together and passed them over his head and all over his body

This meant, we are told, that the Creator had made people as he had made the earth, "and that the Creator was witness to what was to be told." All old or holy stories were told in this way. ² In addition, Chief Buffalo Long Lance has outlined how the mothers of his tribe set large store by correct language usage. Someone who used language without "absolute correctness," he says, was "relegated to an outcast in the tribe," and was never allowed to speak in public. ³ Early visitors to the Iroquois were impressed by the oratorical skills of speakers whom they, unaware of the rhetorical training involved, assumed to be naturally and natively inspired. The Word, in fact, is a sacrament, a vital force, so that, for instance, a hunting song is not just a pleasant aesthetic experience, but possesses an active relationship with the hunting act. "The purpose of the song," writes the contemporary Native American poet Simon Ortiz, "is first of all to do things well, the way they're supposed to be done, part of it being the singing and performing of a song. And that I receive, again well and properly, the things that are meant to be returned to me. I express myself as well as realize the experience." ⁴

It is only natural that a society which carried its past in the spoken word, and incorporated its values in story and song, would invest words with reverence and power. Our own vocabulary is hardly adequate to encompass the phenomena of the Word in Native American literature and life. All too often, our rationalistic bias has been satisfied to describe the word-phenomena in such phrases as 'sympathetic word-magic.' This is probably because we ourselves, having contaminated words, have lost faith in them. In our society, words have been suborned. "Oversold like detergents," they wave "their long tails in public/ With their prostitute's exclamations." ⁵

Kenneth Rexroth has written: "Poetry and song does not play a vatic role in Native American society, but is itself a numinous thing. The role of art is holy -- in Rudolph Otto's sense -- an object of supernatural awe, and as such an important instrument in the control of reality on the highest plane." ⁶ In an Indian context, however, the concept of 'control' does not really obtain. Reality is not 'controlled,' no matter on how high a plane. We would do better to talk about reciprocity, balancing, right acting and right telling in the interests of equilibrium. Power flowed; it was not wielded. As often as not, power itself does the choosing, for on the highest level power is a force for common good. ⁷

In matters of the spirit there was no real hierarchy, since matters of the spirit were simultaneously matters of the mundane. As Lame Deer explained (and Black Elk said the same thing): "We Indians live in a world of symbols and images where the spiritual and the commonplace are one."⁸ If, then, we are to approach Native American literature and take what it offers, we will have to cleanse our own words, and reorient our minds. We will also have to revitalize our religious terminology. Rexroth's phrase "supernatural awe," for example, does not describe the Indian's relationship to wakan or orenda. Wakan is a quality in all things (Wakan Tanka, the so-called Great Spirit, is a missionary's misleading interpretation). "Religious awe" suggests a large element of fear in the "holy" and potential self-abasement. This may be appropriate enough for the white man's understanding of holiness, but not, it is clear, Black Elk's relationship to his Great Vision.

A truly sacramental sense of language means that object and word are so fused that their creation, the 'event,' is itself creative, bringing into this time and place the enduring powers which truly effect that which the event claims, and such action cannot be undone. Its only aim and intent is truth, not manipulation. 'Correct' form, in such a context, is the fundamental moral dimension of the human engagement with words. Lies destroy correct form. They destroy the real relationship between man and the natural order. When an Indian made a treaty, he did so with a formula invoking the growing of grass and the running of waters. He linked the truth of words to the truth of nature.

For the Indian there was great power in words. The story, the 'event,' was often regarded as having a life of its own; an entity existing independent of its narrator. In Wishram Texts, Edward Sapir collected a story called, simply, "The Story Concerning Coyote." After performing a deed of self-fellation, Coyote attempted to lock up the story of his deed. Some say he locked it up in a mountain north of the Columbia River whose name was 'Story.' But the story of Coyote's deed burst out with tremendous force, causing clefts in the mountain. Thus, a story brings about its own consequences. It is a repository of irrepressible truth, and reveals itself spontaneously, despite all efforts to hold it in.⁹

Where do we find these stories? One place is in the comfortable old green volumes of the 47 Annual Reports of the Bureau of American Anthropology, Department of the Smithsonian, which were published from 1881-1932. The collectors of this 'sacred art' (songs, poems, stories, dramas) were anthropologists, ethnologists, linguists; distinguished scholars such as Boas, Sapir, Kroeber, Radin. They deserve our gratitude, for without their dedication much of great value would have been lost forever. In these green volumes I first began reading Native American literature, and then went on to supplement my reading with material published by the American Ethnological Society, such as Ruth Bunzel's Zuni Texts, or William Jones' Kickapoo Tales, with its Wizákää cycle. I also came across Leonard Bloomfield's Menomini Texts, in which there are a score of memorable stories, including my favorite 'The Man Who Married a Deer Woman.'¹⁰

These series, and others, are, of course, still available in libraries. But what we now need are new versions, or better, new translations in cheap editions for school and college use; translations with the same fundamental engagement with language as that of the original creators. Dell Hymes had put out a call for new translations which utilize "the perspectives and tools of linguistics" as well as "anthropological philology." He outlines the need, in addition, for skilled poet-translators. "The contemporary reader," he writes, "now has modern translations of Greek drama by Lattimore, Fitzgerald, Grene, Arrowsmith and others that are manifestly poems in a contemporary idiom; but for much Amerindian poetry, he has translations from two poetic generations ago, or more, many of which are not even by intention poetry, but careful prose." ¹¹ Hymes himself has set about the task, in this, as in much else, opening the way. In his translations he utilizes the discovery that behind the plain prose of the texts is a complex poetic structure, and that what, in poetry, appear to be meaningless syllables, under analysis turn out to serve a structural purpose. In addition to Hymes, Dennis Tedlock has provided the most exciting translations in his Finding the Center: Narrative Poetry of the Zuni Indians (Lincoln, Neb., 1977). Here the text is scored for voicing, and a sense of 'total' translation comes over. In addition to this kind of attention, a tradition going back to Longfellow has continued, a tradition of 'versions' and inspirational influence. The names of Yvor Winters, Rexroth, Snyder, Wagoner, Merwin come immediately to mind, as well as Rothenberg's recastings, which are attempts to get back to the original effect or 'feel' of a performance. ¹²

Sooner or later the question arises: why have we had to wait so long for attention to be paid? Milman Parry discovered the oral-formulaic structure of Homer about forty years ago. Why has it taken so long for his lead to be followed in America? Is it only in the last few years that racist attitudes have changed radically? Possibly, though a glance at recent events in the Mohawk Nation, the Pacific Northwest, and elsewhere, plus the various bills in Congress aimed at eliminating the land-base of Indians -- e.g. H.R. 9054, H.R. 9950, H.R. 9951 -- temper one's optimism. Perhaps the reason Native American oral literature is finally being taken seriously is that, as Harry Levin has suggested, "the Word as spoken or sung, together with the visual image of the speaker or singer," has been regaining its hold through "electrical engineering." ¹³ A culture based on the written word has undergone change. Pleas have been made by educators for a new understanding of 'primary' and 'secondary' orality, since universities are now called upon to teach students from oral backgrounds. "Our students from oral or residually oral cultures," writes Walter J. Ong, SJ, "come not from an unorganized world, but from a world which is differently organized, in ways which can now be at least partially understood." ¹⁴

Cultural arrogance and attitudes of cultural imperialism, moreover, while by no means disappearing, have weakened -- the civil rights movement has much to do with this. Also, the later twentieth century has been an age of contact, of translation, or cross-cultural connections on a large scale, when things thought exclusive or disparate have been brought into fruitful proximity

The old assumptions of cultural superiority, which many in the nineteenth century held as gospel, have largely disappeared. We no longer come across such blatant condescension as this from the introduction to Ojibwa Texts, published in 1917: "Simplicity is a characteristic mode of the narratives throughout; they run along with such an even, quiet pace, that they leave an impression of dull monotony." ¹⁵ Western man seems at last to have begun to realize his limitations. His values are being called in question, and the literature of warning, from Commoner to Lasch, points to his "effective loss of cultural traditions." ¹⁶ And now, at last, some people are ready to accept the fact that they have a culture and a literature on their own doorstep through which they can begin to relearn values. ¹⁷

For a long time, Native American literature has been treated as tales for children. ¹⁸ Native American literature is adult and serious. This does not mean that it is grey and down-beat, or that children cannot enjoy it. In fact, a number of stories are intended for children -- but what an Indian means by a child and what we mean are hardly the same thing. The stories are often funny and bawdy, and always affirm life. They aim to instruct and delight. Their purpose is to tell the truth, even if the truth, as revealed for instance by Melville Jacobs' analyses, is often disturbing and frequently horrific or frightening. ¹⁹ As an old Eskimo told Knut Rasmussen: "Our narratives deal with the experiences of man, and these experiences are not always pleasant or pretty. But it is not proper to change our stories to make them more acceptable to our ears, that is, if we wish to tell the truth. Words must be the echo of what has happened and cannot be made to conform to the mood and the taste of the listener." ²⁰ It would be hard to find a higher concept of verbal art.

Perhaps because our own society is so lacking in balance and authentic symbolism, so void of a concept of man as a total being, so lacking in self confidence, it has become able to look more humbly on those cultures which before it had sought to destroy. ²¹ There are attitudes and energies in Native American society which we may well envy. For this society has placed the heaviest stress on keeping everything in balance and good order, within what one might call a cosmic framework and reference. This can be seen in the symbolism of the Sioux circular encampment, as well as in the function of their heyoka, sacred clowns, "upside-down" men, as Lame Deer called them, ²² who, by destroying the balance of expectations and norms draw attention to that which they challenge, and so strengthen and reinstate it. The sense of cosmic balance can be seen in the architecture of the Pawnee who orient their structures cosmically, ²³ an orientation once part of our own civilization. ²⁴ It is curious how, despite the distance between White and Native American civilizations, so often one comes upon a feature which strikes strangely familiar chords, as if we had been there before.

"I was not born and raised on this land for fun," said the Sioux Crow Feather. ²⁵ In Native American societies there is a sense of the seriousness of man's existence, the meaningfulness of life, not its meaninglessness. The traditional stories and poems are a record of vital, vigorous peoples, confident in their achievements and abilities, and proud of their civilizations.

As one man said: "What is civilization? its marks are a noble religion and philosophy, original arts, stirring music, rich story and legend. We had these."²⁶ Everything in this civilization had a place, and its order was not so much imposed as proven to be good by its being lived. Each man discovers what is best. There is no divine fiat which he is forced to obey. Everything is 'fitted.' This is the point of a story in one of Melville Jacobs' collections, 'The Animals Determine Who Will be Elk,' in which they try on the antlers. Jack Rabbit runs off so fast he gets skinny. When they catch him he's all bone and good for nothing. The other animals produce analogous results, until Elk puts on the antlers and they suit him perfectly. He couldn't run so fast, and so when he was caught he was still fat.²⁷

It is about time, then, that we began to study this literature as seriously as we study Faulkner or Hemingway. There is a wisdom here we need to heed. Man is not the conqueror in these stories, for the conqueror role is ultimately self-defeating. Instead, the stories and poems concern themselves with what Aldo Leopold, referring to the biosphere, called "lines of dependence."²⁸ Man here is a triumphant survivor, adequate to the task, ready to take risks and learn. There is little or no sense of alienation and its attendant figure, irony. The aim is wisdom.

Through understanding Native American literature one overcomes cultural isolation and narcissism and comes to understand better one's own civilization. This literature urges us to confront our own psyche and history, a history still all too often sentimentalized and misrepresented. As Richard Slotkin has written: "A people unaware of its myths is likely to continue living by them though the world around that people may change and demand changes in their psychology, their world view, their institutions."²⁹ It was tragic that we were still living a powerful national myth in Viet Nam, where the enemy became Gooks, descendants of Chingachgook. The United States owes a large part of its national character to the suppression of its Indian past. "The conquest of the Indians made the country uniquely American," Michael Rogen has noted.³⁰ And Octavio Paz has remarked that while Mexico is the most Spanish country in Latin America, it is also the most Indian. The Indian element in the United States is invisible, the reason being that "the Christian horror of 'fallen nature' extends to the natives of America: the United States was founded on a land without a past. The historical memory of Americans is European, not American."³¹ The American, then, is always searching for roots, since he refused to graft himself onto the plant already flourishing when he arrived, and instead did his best to eradicate it. As Paz notes, one of the most persistent themes in American literature has been the search for and invention of American roots.³² How long can we, in our alienation and loneliness, afford to neglect, ignore, and pervert our American past? Who better to tell us about it than the first Americans?

Notes

1. Harry Hoijer et al, Linguistic Structures of Native America, Viking Fund Publications in Anthropology, 6, NY, 1944.
2. Cheyenne Memories (Lincoln, 1967), 12.
3. Long Lance (NY, 1929), p.6.
4. Sun Tracks (sprin 1977), p.10.
5. Ted Hughes, "Crow Tries the Media," Crow (NY, 1971), p.3

6. "American Indian Songs," Assays (NY, 1961), p. 56. 7. An informant told Morris E. Opler, "it seems that the powers select for themselves. Perhaps you want to be a shaman of a certain kind, but the powers don't speak to you. It seems that, before power wants to work through you, you've got to be just so, as in the original time." An Apache Life-Way (NY, 1956), p. 202. 8. Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions (NY, 1972), 19. PAES, II (Leyden, 1909). 10. Note 'text' and 'tale,' one denoting a linguistic function, the other a folkloric orientation. It is time to call these 'texts' and 'tales' what they are: stories, literature. 11. "Some North Pacific Coast Poems," American Anthropologist 67 (1965), p. 335. 12. This peak of interest is the second in the 20th century. The first occurred with the Imagists. 13. Albert B. Lord, The Singer of Tales (NY, 1973), preface. 14. Profession, 79 (M.L.A., NY, 1979), p. 5. 15. PAES, 2, part 1, 1917. 16. Christopher Lasch, The Culture of Narcissism (NY, 1979), 261. 17. On Tao, see George Rowley, Principles of Chinese Painting (Princeton, 1959), p. 5. 18. It has also been treated as a mine to be exploited. 19. Clackamas Chinook Myths and Tales (Chicago, 1959). 20. Stanley Diamond in his introduction to Paul Radin, The World of Primitive Man (NY, 1974), xxi. 21. Claude Levi-Strauss has devoted his life to recovering the wisdom of "the savage mind." 22. Lame Deer, p. 13. 23. Gene Weltfish, The Lost Universe (NY, 1965), esp. p. 621. 24. The Earth, The Temple, and the Gods (NY, 1969). 25. I Have Spoken, Virginia I. Armstrong, ed (Chicago, 1971), p. 105. 26. Ibid., 146. 27. Northwest Sahaptin Texts (NY, 1934), p. 8. 28. A Sand County Almanac (NY, 1949), p. 215. 29. Re-generation Through Violence (Middletown, CT, 1973), p. 4. 30. Fathers and Children (NY, 1975), p. 7. 31. "Mexico and the United States," The New Yorker (Sept 17, 1979), p. 40. 32. See Robert F. Sayre, Thoreau and the American Indian (Princeton, 1978).

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Alan R. Velie, ed. American Indian Literature: An Anthology. Norman: Univ of Oklahoma Press, 1979. xii + 356pp. illus. Danny Timmons.

I realize that we who know better are supposed to leave cover copy to the gullible readers for whom it is intended, but sometimes I just can't avoid what I read there. Professor Velie, the back cover of this anthology tells me, "has tested this collection for ten years in the college classroom and is experienced in sharing a unique literature that may be unfamiliar to many readers." He is, moreover, "a Shakespeare scholar, as well as a specialist in Native American literature." These claims shaped my expectations -- that the anthology is the result of the scholarship of a specialist and is especially useful for introducing Indian literature to students. The book satisfies neither expectation. Though work on it was supported by a grant from the NEH, it shows little evidence of any real research, and it is no more useful to students than any of the other dozen or so slapdash anthologies of Indian literature in print.

Dubious scholarly decisions are evident throughout the anthology. Most of the section devoted to American Indian song consists of material reprinted from Frances Densmore's publication in BAE Bulletins. While Densmore's work with song recording was monumental, the unreliability of her transcriptions, translations, and musical notation is well known. Yet Velie cuts and pastes some thirty pages straight from Densmore without the slightest caveat. Similarly, the authenticity of the Walum Olum, the other major part of Velie's section on song, has been questioned almost continuously since its first publication by an erratic French scholar in the 1830s. Velie ignores the question of the piece's authenticity and introduces it with the misleading notion that "the Walum Olum is the Bible and Aeneid of the Delawares." The same inattention to existing scholarship and

research detail is evident throughout the anthology. The piece which Velie reprints from Momaday's House Made of Dawn as "Francisco's Bear Hunt" was first published as a separate piece by Momaday in the New Mexico Quarterly, 37 (1967). Surely an editor who has researched his selections would acknowledge that, even if he finally chose to use a title he considered more appropriate than Momaday's own.

If the book is intended for classroom use, as appears to be the case, it is odd that the selections are not accompanied by any suggestions for additional reading. There are no bibliographic suggestions anywhere in the collection, not even at the end of the book!

The editing ranges from inattentive to deplorable. Typical is "The Origin Myth of Acoma," the first selection and the longest, reprinted from Matthew W. Stirling's The Origin Myth of Acoma and Other Records, published by the Bureau of American Ethnology in 1942. Velie in a few loose paragraphs compares the Acoma narrative to the Old Testament, Plato, Jove's taking of Danae, and Luke's account of the impregnation of Mary. Nowhere does Velie choose to mention introductory information given by Stirling in the original edition, information essential to understanding the text. Surely we should know something about the limitations of the translation, about the narrator, the recorder's understanding of the nature of the text.

We are given the impression, furthermore, that Velie reprints a complete text. Comparing what I find in the original to what Velie reprints I find only 13 of 98 pages reproduced. No mention is made of reasons for this abridgment. All 197 notes to the text from the original have been discarded. The notes are more than dry ethnological technicalities; many give translations for Acoma words which stand untranslated in the Velie version. Others clarify the cultural context. Others have direct relevance to our perception of this demanding narrative as literature. For example, two of the principal characters are female twins. Early on in the story they receive two baskets filled with seeds and little images of all the different animals in the world. These, they are told, were sent them by their father. "They asked who was meant by their father, and Tsichtinako replied that his name was Uch'tsiti, and that he wished them to take their baskets out into the light, when the time came." A reader of Velie's version will know Uch'tsiti only as Uch'tsiti, a word not easy to pronounce (especially since one is not provided the orthographic conventions Sterling used). Sterling, by contrast, gives his reader some help. His note reads: "from kut'tsiti, crammed full (in the basket): the implication being 'nothing lacking.'" This is information any student of Acoma literature needs to appreciate its power and texture. In his introduction Velie says Indian literature should be judged by the same criteria as any other literature, one criterion being "Is it well executed -- that is, is language used skillfully?" By deleting the Uch'tsiti note Velie calls into question his ability to apply his own criterion.

Sterling's note on the other Acoma name mentioned above is even more useful. The note on Tsichtinako (deleted by Velie) reads in part: "Boas reports a spirit at Laguna known as Ts'ts'tc'i'na'k'o, 'Thought-Woman. Gunn speaks of Sitchtchenako, who is 'creator of all.' At Sia we find Sus'sistinnako, who is also a creator, and is said to be a spider." It is hard to understand why a "specialist in Native American literature" would edit out the translation of the name of a major character in the story. One is puzzled that he doesn't use the note as an opportunity to say something about Leslie Silko's novel Ceremony beginning

Ts'its'tsi'nako, Thought-Woman
is sitting in her room
and whatever she thinks about
appears.

A possible link between "The Origin Myth of the Acoma" and Ceremony isn't worth mentioning to Velie. He chooses not to print any of Silko's work (nor mention her, nor any other female Indian writer). But what of Simon Ortiz, an Acoma poet Velie does include, who occasionally uses Acoma language and often draws on its rhythms, and has a sequence of poems centered on Kaweshtima (Mt. Taylor), the sacred mountain of the Acomas and prominent in their "Origin Myth"?

Problems with the book go beyond lazy editing and an unhealthy scattering of factual error. Some commentary shows a profound misunderstanding of the nature of Indian literature. In the book's third sentence Velie writes: "the traditional literature was composed in an Indian language for an Indian audience at a time when the tribal cultures were intact and contact with whites had been minimal." Through out, the oral tradition is referred to in the past tense: at the very definitional core of the anthology reappears an uninformed, romantic image of the vanishing Indian. Native American oral literatures continue. They continue to be composed. They continue to be performed. They continue to be a vital part of many Indian communities. When we define "traditional" literature as Velie does here we are not only wrong factually, but we also deny contemporary Indian people recognition of one of the richest, continuing portions of their literary heritage.

In sum, this is not a book based on any discernable scholarship and is not well designed for students. With the glut of anthologies of Indian literature of like quality already on the market it is hard to see why Oklahoma published this book. I'll continue to use more focus: well-researched collections like Bierhorst's Four Masterworks, Ramsey's Coyote Was Going There, and Hobson's Remembered Earth in my classes.

- - - Larry Evers Univ of Arizona

Alan R. Velie establishes his criteria for selection on firm literary grounds: "selections in this book are presented as serious literature to be judged as literature. They are not being presented as quaint relics of a forgotten people or as ethnic curiosities." In line with his principles, he prefaces each item with introductory comments which situate the work in the context of world literature. These excellent and informed commentaries distinguish the book from the many others preceding it, and they make American Indian Literature a valuable contribution to the field.

While the introductions to each selection deserve praise, some of Velie's decisions about what material to include require more cautious commentary. There are eight sections, comprising both oral and written literature. The sections on memoirs and fiction are made up primarily of excerpts from longer works such as Black Elk Speaks, House Made of Dawn and Winter in the Blood. The excerpted passages are like still silhouettes against the energetic background of the whole work. Although Velie acknowledges that "there are a goodly number of poets," his poetry section is one of the shortest, with examples from eight poets, none a woman.

With some exceptions, like the origin myth of Acoma, the oral sections emphasize Plains and Woodlands material. These sections are better than comparable ones in previous anthologies, because there are enough examples of a given oral genre to help students grasp its artistic possibilities. Velie includes 49 episodes of the Winnebago Trickster cycle and examples of Chippewa, Teton-Sioux, Mandan, and Hidatsa traditional songs. Finally, we have Danny Timmons' art. Each line drawing is as much a commentary on its subject as an illustration. The drawings are an important reason for my recommending the book to teachers -- at least for their librarians. What kind of a textbook it would make depends largely, it seems to me, on how the teacher supplements the material in it.

* * * Elaine Jahner Univ of Nebraska

Buckskin Tokens: Contemporary Oral Narratives of the Lakota. ed. R. D. Thiesz. Aberdeen, S.D.: North Plains Press, 1975. 75pp. \$3.00

A problem with the study of native American oral traditions is that a transcription often leaves out much of a story's vitality. Most scholars who have worked with native storytellers wish they could include those elements of the narrator's art which are excluded in print: pitch and tone change to signify different characters, pauses to signal important events, and, of course, facial expressions and gestures. Dennis Tedlock and others have tried to remedy the problem by including "stage directions" and by discarding standardized printing methods. Others, like R. D. Thiesz, offer scholars both a transcript and a videotape of traditional stories.

Thiesz prefaces this collection of tales by four Lakota narrators with an introduction explaining the differences between Lakota categories of narratives and those of Euro-Americans. The Lakota differentiate between ohunkanka, narratives accepted as not true, and ehanni woyaka, true narratives. These latter stretch back to the mythic beginnings of the tribe and its rituals. Fictional stories include those concerning the tricks Iktomi, who continues to delight and instruct his people. The introduction includes a useful short commentary on the trickster and his role in Lakota life and literature. Each of the four sections of the book begins with a short discussion by the narrator of the types of stories he or she will tell, and the customs that go with the relating of the stories. The narratives offer a good cross-section of both true and fictitious forms. The true tale of the white buffalo calf woman who brings the sacred pipe to her people carries a deep significance for all Sioux people, who continue to venerate the pipe, finding in this story connections with their ancient tribal traditions.

Among fictitious tales Thiesz has included a number of Iktomi stories which succinctly illustrate the trickster's character. Two are especially funny: the story of the proud and cynical Iktomi trying to imitate the medicine men, and the story of greedy, unheeding Iktomi who is almost destroyed in a bout with flatulence. There are also two versions of the story of Iktomi tricking the dancing ducks. These make an interesting comparison, especially since the tale has recently taken on new dimensions with Iktomi symbolizing the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the ducks symbolizing gullible Indians.

Although the collection is not large, it is a most welcome addition to the growing number of transcriptions which are to be used in conjunction with videotapes. The serious student is afforded the opportunity both to read the story and the view and hear it being told. This volume is enhanced by pictures of the storytellers in action and drawings that go with the narrations. Thiesz concludes with a selected bibliography, both of Lakota material and readings on Indian literature in general. Buckskin Tokens is a significant contribution to the study of Native American oral traditions.

Paul N. Pavich Fort Lewis College

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