

Studies in American Indian Literatures

NEWSLETTER

of the

Association For Study

of

AMERICAN INDIAN LITERATURES

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STUDIES IN AMERICAN INDIAN LITERATURE
Volume 7, no. 4, Winter, 1983

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REVIEW ISSUE

Alan R. Velie. Four American Indian Literary Masters: N.Scott Momaday, James Welch, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Gerald Vizenor Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982. pp. 164. illus., notes.,biblio., index, 14.95 cloth, 9.95 paper.

Indisputably this is the first book-length study of leading contemporary American Indian writers and their work, and a first glance at the format of Four American Indian Literary Masters is encouraging. Instead of attempting a survey of this uneven field Velie wisely concentrates on a few Indian writers. The four figures that he chooses are surely as important and deserving of attention as anyone else, whether or not they are "masters." Velie has also tried to write a book that is useful to teachers and students trying to come to terms with poetry and fiction that constitutes a new and exciting but problematical sector of American Literature. Such intentions deserve praise, for anyone who has tried seriously to explore Native American writing will see the merits of what Velie defines as his central purpose: "to show how contemporary Indian writers have drawn on their tribal heritage and how they have been affected by modern American and European literary movements." (p.10)

But to say it is the first book of its type is not to say it is a trail-blazer, and sad to relate, there is much more to regret about

Velie's book than to applaud. If his basic purposes are good, he fails to realize most of them; someone else --someone willing to take more time and pains with the task --will have to write the pioneering book on modern Indian writing that Velie might have written.

What's wrong with Four American Indian Literary Masters? Nothing, as I've said, with singling out Momaday, Welch, Silko, and Vizenor for scrutiny, but Velie has not taken the trouble to indicate how these four artists belong to a whole field of native writers. In dealing with Momaday and Welch as poets, he does not so much as mention such accomplished Indian poets as Duane Niatum, Simon Ortiz, and Ray Young Bear. As for Velie's treatment of his four writers, the fact that Indian fiction had a century-long tradition which preceded Momaday apparently means nothing to him.

Evidently Velie wants to be helpful to his fellow teachers: in his preface he indicates that the book grew out of his own courses at the University of Oklahoma. But, if so, where are the full bibliographies and "suggested readings" with which students and teachers could carry on their studies? Although Velie devotes a third of his book to Momaday, he neglects to use or even cite Momaday's most important critical statement on his own work to date, "The Man Who Made Words," and his bibliographical treatment of other writers is equally incomplete and unhelpful. It would be too easy to read Four Masters and never realize that a new and sophisticated field of American literary study is opening up because of writers like these four; and indeed Velie's tone often suggests that he has pitched his commentary in the other direction, at a very low level of sophistication. About Welch's poem, "Getting Things Straight" he says, characteristically, "The poem is an existential statement about Welch's search for meaning in his life." (p.78) Elsewhere, we are offered highly simplified

lectures on such topics as surrealism, the comic novel, post-modernism, and so on. There is too much chalk in this book: such topics are relevant to the native works Velie is discussing, but he rarely succeeds in discussing them beyond the level of black-board labelling.

Velie's most serious failure lies in his inability to "show how Indian writers have drawn on their tribal heritage..." Again, his references suggest almost no awareness of the important work being done on this crucial and difficult question by writers associated with MELUS, or other journals. He does not make use of or even acknowledge the researches of ethnopoeitic scholars like Dell Hymes, J. Barre Toelken, and Dennis Tedlock, whereby we begin to understand what the native tribal heritage is and has been. How Velie can discuss Leslie Silko's Ceremony as a "grail romance," without acknowledging in any detail that the novel's explicit informing myth is the Keresan Nau'ts'ty'i cycle is beyond me, and I should think beyond anyone who has read Silko's novel. There is no excuse for his concluding remark in discussing in an otherwise adequate commentary on Momaday's House Made of Dawn: "Like Joyce's Finnegans Wake, [the novel] ends as it began. Abel is running and as he runs he sings. It is important to notice what he sings: The Navajo prayer song, 'House Made of Dawn.'" (p.64) Thus ends Velie's commentary on the song's significance in context. The fact is that such unamplified mere "notice" begs every kind of interpretive question about Momaday's novel and its considerable debt to native oral tradition: it is typical, I'm afraid, of Velie's method.

Perhaps we are prepared for such glosses by his remarkable admission that, "My reason for emphasizing contemporary Indian writers is that my training and knowledge of earlier literatures is only marginal. Anthropologists,

it seems to me, are the best teachers of myths." (p.x) --but prepared does not mean reconciled, and I find it impossible to reconcile this book either to what it promises, or to what its literary subjects deserve, or to the fact that it has been published by a major university press with a notable commitment to Indian studies.

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Jarold Ramsey, University of Rochester

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Hanay Geiogamah. New Native American Drama: Three Plays. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980. xxiv +113 pp. Hb. \$9.95 Pb. 4.95.

Hanay Geiogamah's plays are distinctive, both in being the first substantial collection of Native American Drama and in their unique organic structures. The Native American Ensemble, organized by Geiogamah in 1972, premiered all three plays --Body Indian, Fog Horn and 49. Each addresses a single aspect of being an Indian in North America. The first, Body Indian, is a bleak dramatization of the effects of alcoholism. The second, Fog Horn, dramatizes the history of relationships between Indians and Ameropeans. The third, 49, juxtaposes 19th century Native Americans with contemporary Indian youths.

Bobby Lee, the protagonist of Body Indian, is an alcoholic with an artificial leg. Throughout the play he expresses a desire to use the \$400 he's just been paid for leasing his land to pay for alcoholic treatment. But early on, it is obvious that this dream is futile. Hanging out with several other alcoholics in his "uncle" Howard's one-room apartment, Bobby Lee is too weak-willed to stop drinking; and since all his friends have the same problem, no one is strong enough to help him.

Near the end of each of the five scenes,

Bobby Lee passes out; and in turn, the other characters roll him for money to buy more wine. Although there is some comic relief when the characters dance, sing, and joke about the money they don't have, overall Body Indian is starkly naturalistic, a somber warning.

The bizarre party mood is broken in each scene by the lights and whistle of a train. This repeated motif implies that all alcoholics are in danger of being maimed, because Bobby Lee lost his own leg when he passed out on a railroad track. The train symbolizes the culture that invaded their land, dislocating the Indians from their source of life. So cut off from the earth are these alcoholics that after they have taken all his money, they sell Bobby Lee's artificial leg for wine.

The politics of Body Indian are subtle; Fog Horn centers on politics. Each scene depicts an important event or influence in American Indian history. The action moves from the Indian's forced journey from the West Indies to Alcatraz Island, the occupation of Alcatraz in 1969, to a nun trying to shame Indians into accepting Christianity, to Princess Pocahontas telling her handmaidens about her sexual encounter with John Smith, to The Lone Ranger trying to persuade Tonto to get killed in the next episode, to the First Lady announcing a plan to convert an Indian reservation into a national park, to a telephone conversation between a spy wearing an Indian braid and the President, to a list of broken treaties, interspersed with a musical chorus of platitudes, to a Wild West show, to Wounded Knee in 1973.

At the end of key scenes, Indians take action to end their oppression. For example, in the third scene the Indians attack the nun. Tonto cuts the Lone Ranger's throat. At the end of the play, when the narrator says "I am not guilty," we realize that the play was a kind of trial, and the jury must decide in the

Indians' favor.

The third of these plays, 49, shows how Indians relate to their identity in a positive way. The play is unusual in that it moves back and forth between two time periods. The setting is a ceremonial ground circa 1885 and the same ceremonial ground in the present. A character named Night Walker represents the ancient knowledge, values, and traditions of his people, the foundation for the 49. But the occasion for the play is a modern celebration, a 49, which begins about midnight after the more formal activities of a powwow. Highway patrolmen harass the contemporary Indians throughout the play. The policemen's voices occasionally are interjected into the ceremony, and must represent the U.S. governments stifling of Indian self determination.

In a scene set in the past, Night Walker tells the young people of this tribe, "Do not be afraid to make new songs." He continues:

You must lead our clan

To a time of understanding

When a man will not hurt a man

By killing his way of living.

Singing Man and Weaving Woman also encourage the young to create and not be discouraged or impatient. Songs and the designs of artists are a gift of nature--the turtle, the red ant. If the materials to make a work are not available today, that does not mean the art form is dead. Weaving Woman consoles women worried about the future: "A design can live and grow for many years before it is placed on the loom. You can always see it...when you close your eyes."

In the next to last scene the conflict between Indians and police comes to a climax. Police have blocked the road to the ceremony grounds. The 49 group form a line of defense and shouts "Don't come any further...You're not taking ...any..of us!" Night Walker then says, "A beautiful bird is flying."

The last scene shows Night Walker in the center of the circle of the 49ers who are maintaining the arbor, a symbol of cultural unity, a unity expressed by the Navajo Night Chant.

49 is the most hopeful of the three plays, for it dramatizes a group of contemporary youth with purpose and a meaning in relation to the cycle of life. It is the only one of the three that I have seen performed, at its premiere at Oklahoma City University, in January 1975. In seeing and reading the play I was closer to a shared ritual experience than is usual in contemporary American stage drama. While its structure is fragmented, and Night Walker's first speech is weak, the play overall has great vitality. Of the three Body Indian is the best drama, since it focuses on individuals and not types, and because it has unity of time and place its emotional effect is powerful. But Fog Horn and 49 are valuable for the ideas they present. They are plays for the mind more than the emotions, and they too contain much for the Indians and other people to consider and resolve.

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Norma Wilson, University of Oklahoma

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We've had several requests for essays about the problems of teaching writing, so when we received T.D. Allen's book, the first specifically addressed to creative writing classes for Native Americans, we asked the Director of Composition at Columbia's School of General Studies to evaluate it in a fashion useful to those of us who teach composition and creative writing.

T.D. Allen. Writing to Create Ourselves.
University of Oklahoma Press, 1982

When T.D. Allen, a professional writer and editor, accepted an invitation to teach

creative writing at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico, she found many students with a history of failure in English. No one doubted their talent, for these students expressed themselves freely and well in other art forms. The problem, as she analyzed it, was that traditional teaching, with an emphasis on correct grammar had combined with an oppressive culture to silence these students in English. The results of Allen's teaching apparently exceeded even her own high hopes, and she avers that in her classroom students almost always found satisfaction, and occasionally even commercial success, in writing. Allen later founded the Written Arts department at IAIA and began training programs for teachers in 144 Indian Schools. She directs her book to teachers of students with any kind of block to writing, such as English as a second language or the fear of making mistakes. She labels her method "teaching-upside-down --writing first, then grammar." Students first embrace writing as a means of discovering what they have to say, or creating themselves, and turn to grammar only as needed for revision. Although she dismisses too quickly the difficulty of the instruction needed to teach students to correct their own work, teachers will value her idealistic approach and her store of practicable techniques and well-designed assignments.

Too many teachers who confront students who have serious difficulties in writing sooner or later rationalize recurrent failure by declaring the students ineducable. This disdain for students, perhaps the most destructive consequence of placing unwilling teachers in classrooms of students with academic deficiencies, poisons the efforts of all concerned. For Allen, such a negative attitude would disqualify a teacher, since she builds her approach on a belief in the ability of every student to write. This conviction that

everyone can and should learn to write places her book with Errors and Expectations: A guide for the teacher of basic writing (New York: Oxford, 1977) by Mina Shaughnessy, who determined that even the most underprepared students at City College in New York could become competent writers. The books have important differences: Allen deals with creative writing, Shaughnessy with expository writing; Allen helps teachers build motivation to write, Shaughnessy helps them understand the reasons for mistakes; Allen's approach is descriptive and anecdotal, Shaughnessy's theoretical and thorough. In fact, Shaughnessy's book provides a good complement to Allen's for teachers who want to analyze the series of complex tasks that students, particularly those with English as a second language, must master as they develop proficiency in writing.

Allen prescribes "three simple steps" toward teaching any student to write well:

1. Believe it yourself and convince them that they have something of significance to say on the one subject in which every student is interested --life for human beings.
2. Discover each student's experience-based subjects, those on which he is the one and only authority and can, therefore, write well.
3. Keep students writing until they have said exactly what they want to say.

Allen shows teachers how to take the first two steps, but she pretty much leaves them on their own for the third.

Some advocates of innovation in teaching writing have recommended what Peter Elbow calls a "teacherless writing class" [Writing Without Teachers (New York: Oxford, 1973)], that is, a class in which a group of peers provides stimulus and response to writing. By contrast,

Allen's approach centers on the teacher as model and motivator, performer and audience, for she directs and monitors each student's progress.

Allen shows students they have something to say by giving them a series of writing exercises designed to generate the excitement of self-expression. She begins each class with an exercise called "the five doors," a name referring to the way both babies and writers must learn, by opening wide the five senses. This assignment, in which students describe an object, fosters the habit of attention to detail. If the object to be described is a piece of paper, for example, she tears it, crumples it, looks through it, and tastes it to demonstrate the range of sensory impressions students might record. She then gives the following typically complete and evocative descriptions:

If, when you write, you will put on paper exactly how something looks to you (size,color, shape), how it tastes to you (sweet,sour, bitter), how it sounds (melody,clatter,beat) how it smells (stinky or fragrant), and how it feels (warm, smooth,rough), you can make something wonderful happen.

What happens is that students notice and articulate their relation to the world and express their own sensations for others to experience. After an introduction to the "magic" of communication through writing, Allen can lead students like a piper through a series of descriptive assignments to the writing of a complete autobiography, a prerequisite, she believes, for knowing what one has to say. By this time students learn to trust her enough to give a full, honest, account of their lives: to demonstrate the

personal nature of these works she locks them in a cabinet every night. Students then work on finding appropriate forms or the raw material in their autobiographies by experimenting with the patterns Allen has devised to teach the writing of poems and stories.

Allen's devotion to students impresses most when she speaks of working on their papers, or taking her second step. She reads a paper primarily to enjoy and experience it rather than to judge it, looking carefully for seeds of future fruits, for "sparks in the ashes." She makes comments with an eye to guiding future drafts rather than to correcting this one. In addition to making marginal notes, she writes long letters, and the numerous samples of these illustrate better than anything her sensitive approach to the nurturing of writers. To teachers who worry about the time for taking this care in grading, she suggests they try it one day at a time because she knows they will soon become addicted to paying close attention to students' progress.

Allen maintains that "almost any sincere teacher" can follow her steps and that the only ones she has seen fail were unwilling to give enough time or personal involvement. That success rate probably applies better to the first two steps than to the third, which requires helping students revise their work for correctness as well as for content. Most teachers know that the excitement of finding a good assignment, conducting a spirited class discussion on it, and having students write can end in the frustration of seeing in the papers the distance between intention and outcome. To prepare teachers for the inevitable failures, Allen might have included a series of drafts of a paper along with the analyses and advice given and grammar lessons prescribed. Although the nature of this book does not require that it treat linguistic and grammatical issues,

teachers should be aware that study in these areas should accompany sensitivity to language and literature. Knowledge of the problems facing students with English as a second language can help teachers deal with the stubbornness of habits in language and perhaps save years of experimentation.

Finally, Allen bases her teaching on the assumption that Indian students should concentrate on writing in English: "The claim of this book is that they can say it in English and that anyone who hopes to make his statement to a large audience had better learn to make it in English" (*italics in original*). She advocates, though briefly, preserving Indian languages and disapproves of bilingual programs because they undermine ability in English. English has the flexibility to contain Indian feeling, she believes, and indeed the language may be enriched by the presence of Indian idiom and thought. "English is your language," she tells her students, and she challenges, "What do you want to say in it?" Some will wish that she had been more sensitive to the pull of expression in one's native language, but her devotion to her students seems beyond question. She strives for nothing less than an affirmation of the value of each individual through writing: "Once [a student] has written and written well (well enough that someone else will read with understanding what he has written), he can never again be put down, nor can he put himself down as 'just a kid' or as 'just an Indian'." At a time when teachers need affirmation of their own worth, Allen gives it to them in this optimistic, inspiring book.

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Carole Slade, Columbia University

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Death Dances: Two novellas on North American Indians. John Marvin, "Wink of Eternity" and Raymond Abbot, "The Axing of Leo White

Hat." Cambridge, Mass: Apple-Wood Press, 1979. 118 pp. \$3.75.

The first and longer of these novellas, "The Wink of Eternity" is about a bilingual M.D. of Hispano-Papago and Yankee parents who, after Harvard Medical School and a five year residency in Mexico City, undertakes a solitary and unsponsored medical mission to the Tarahumara Indians in the Sierra Madres of Chihuahua. With some reluctance, the jefe of a pueblo gives him shelter and invites him to help the shaman eradicate the typhoid and other diseases afflicting them. With great tact and efficiency the doctor makes his rounds, sets up a clinic, spots the source of the typhoid, and trains a beautiful young woman as his nurse. The shaman, however, sees him as a rival and a threat, and undermines him.

Although the doctor thinks that he has figured a way to aid the Indians with modern medicine while still respecting their culture, the shaman has the last laugh when he tricks the doctor into a duel in which the doctor only has a knife. By letting the doctor kill him, the shaman can "will over to his people some portion of a possible future in an alien world to which he himself could not belong."

I think I know what this conclusion suggests, but I'm not sure of its meaning, or that the author is sure of its meaning. But at least the conclusion is consistent with the rest of the story: it's stupid.

Generally I don't think there is much point in reviewing books one doesn't admire but the second novella, "The Axing of Leo White Hat," has redeeming qualities, and if you like, you can consider the rest of this piece an editorial rather than a review.

The cliches of the Western movie are so well known that even Massachusetts writers are often aware of them, but apparently at least one of them is not aware of the pseudo-romantic use

and abuse of Indian "material" for "a cheap opportunity for fantasy and visceral pleasure", a mistake also made by Antonin Artaud, the most mythologized of the counterheroes of systematic disintegration, even though he understood the "'philosophical' nature of Indian life." (The Writer and the Shaman, Elemire Zolla, p.207). Artaud, coincidentally, also wrote about the Tarahumara and his sojourn among them. I would be pleased to learn that Marvin was a Tarahumara, or a medical missionary, but I'm afraid he is merely a reader, and not a good enough reader, or writer.

The novella is full of howlers and is written in a style that echoes the worst qualities of Artaud and other writers who could romanticize the primitive. The old theme of the corruption of the traditional, stable, primitive society by the well-meaning technocrat is developed with only a thin disguise of pseudo-erudition, and includes all the stock characters. There is the sophisticated, dedicated medico; the manana Mexicans; the nubile and willing Indian maid; the naive but strong and generous chief; the sneaky medicine man; the half-breed of the tribe who villainously tries to protect his own prestige and power in the tribe at the expense of both Helpful Science and tribesmen. Making both the doctor and his antagonist of mixed blood relieves the simple cliché of the do-gooding outsider versus the purely evil insider, though how a the half-breed gained his position in a village where no one else has mixed blood is left unexplained.

Such a plot and such characters would perhaps be tolerable if it were not for the style of the book, by turns literary, archaic, self-conscious, curious and inept, or simply ludicrous. The ludicrous passages at least provide comic relief. My favorite is the soft-core porn of the passage where the doctor and his Indian nurse are working in the make-

shift clinic, treating, among others, "two boys of twelve...a veritable Castor and Pollux of the future." The doctor "followed the easeful adagios of her movements. She would be with him in this zero-time between the now and the night...What were his intentions with her? She was taboo to him, but that might be waived by the tribe. Somehow the thought of miscegenation with her, with her racial oneness, inflamed him further. He thought: was it suggestion of wrongness in coitus with her that enhanced his longing? The wish to sully her? Another pointless quandary!"

But having her love, he reasons, would unite him with the tribe and "spell the end of the demon, Chabo-chi," so he makes his move and grabs her hand holding some cotton swabs:

"Listen, Rosalina, if we wished it...could you and I join ourselves together, my body and yours?"

"Her mouth kept its upcurl of lubricious innocence..." Would you like to see me whole? As you do with patients?"

Wow! Really playing doctor, he is pleased as she strips to reveal full breasts and "the lower female but not crude, its clefts and velours not so much naked as clothed in its own nudity." Now that's tasteful (if wildly comic) fantasy.

But before our poetically leering doc can take Rosalina's temperature, one of the two boys --we don't know if it is Castor or Pollux-- begins coughing and retching and the moment is lost. He will have to settle for sticking the knife into the medicine man in the next episode.

What is depressing about "Wind of Eternity" goes beyond its meretricious plot and style. The author is described as a teacher at one of our better universities, and if it isn't bad enough to know that such a person seems untouched by the growth in awareness of Native American realities and the inadequacy of

Euro-American shenanigans regarding it, the cover tells us he has a companion piece to this story published in the Hudson Review, a leading intellectual and literary journal. If our teachers and writers cannot do better than this, we're still back with Capt. John Smith and Pocahontas, despite the artsy veneer and pseudo-anthropology of this story.

The other novella, Raymond Abbott's "The Axing of Leo White Hat," is another matter entirely. No "lubricious innocence" or "easeful adagios" here, rather, a brutal story of a drunken murder and its destructive aftermath told in taut, straightforward, idiomatic English. In subject and style it belongs in the tradition of the "new naturalism" of the 60's and later. Each chapter is brief, some only one or two pages, and they provide the impression of breadth in this short tale, describing the compressed events from various points of view: the omniscient narrator focuses at times on the overall scene in and around a South Dakota Sioux Reservation. At times the focus shifts to the murderous half-breed bully, to his victim, to his drinking buddies, to his girlfriend, to the priest who futilely tries to hold back chaos, finally to the police who arrive too late and try to extract a confession from an innocent man.

It is a bitter tale, and while it by no means tells all about modern reservation life, it is authentic, despite the annoyance of the author telling us several times that some of the characters speak "Indian," as if that were a language.

The cover copy notes that Abbott lived on a South Dakota reservation in the 60's and "is working on an Indian novel." That may be something to look forward to, and this novella may be appropriate for our classes and reading lists.

Robert Lewis
University of North Dakota

American Indian Stories by Zitkala Sa (Gertrude Bonnin). Glorieta, New Mexico: Rio Grande Press, 1976; reprint of the 1921 edition, published by Hayworth Publishing House, Washington D.C. 182 pp. \$10

In the April 1900 issue of The Red Man, the school newspaper of the Carlisle Indian School, Zitkala Sa, a Dakota Sioux, defended the autobiographical sketches she had just published in the January, February, and March Issues of The Atlantic Monthly:

I give outright the varying moods of my own evolution; those growing pains which knew not reason while active. To stir up views and earnest comparisons of theories was one of the ways in which I hoped it would work a benefit to my people. No one can dispute my own impressions and bitterness! Perhaps a reason may be assigned to them --that I have left my friends to do.

The three essays in question --"Impressions of an Indian Childhood," "The School Days of an Indian Girl," and "An Indian Teacher Among Indians" provoked astonishment and even rage among the more conservative administrators at Carlisle because of Zitkala Sa's honest depiction of the negative effects of boarding schools on Native American children. Her own growing pains were occasioned not just by the "iron routine" of the school or the difficulty of being "deaf to the English language," but also by the estrangement from her mother she suffered when she returned home to Yankton after four years away at school. She writes:

I was neither a wee girl nor a tall one;
neither a wild Indian one nor a tame one.
This deplorable situation was the effect
of my brief course in the East.

She ends the last of three autobiographical narratives with the question of "whether real life or long-lasting death lies beneath the semblance of civilization." That is, what price assimilation? What sort of education equips one to survive? Are cultural survival and individual development mutually exclusive?

These questions became recurrent themes in the other essays and short stories Zitkala Sa published between 1900 and 1902. In "Why I am a Pagan," she defends her preference for "excursions into the natural gardens" of the Great Spirit to the dogma of Christianity. "The Soft-Hearted Sioux" is a fictional account of the inadequacy of off-reservation schools to prepare Indians to live within their own cultures. "A Warrior's Daughter" and "The Tribal Path" both celebrate the bravery and resourcefulness of the Sioux, and "The Blue Star Woman" exposes the graft and corruption of the Indians who became pawns of government agencies intent on changing the old order.

In 1921, Zitkala Sa collected these essays and stories and one or two others in a volume called American Indian Stories (Washington, D.C.: Hayworth Press). In 1976, The Rio Grande Press reprinted the volume with a new preface. Unfortunately, for no apparent reason, "America's Indian Problem" has been excluded from the volume, though it was listed in the table of contents.

The "essay" is really a reprint of a report from the Bureau of Municipal Research on an investigation into the Bureau of Indian Affairs, with a brief introduction by Zitkala Sa; it represents her shift in interests from

literature to politics and foreshadows her life's work on behalf of Indians and their rights.

Another omission from the original publication is an interesting letter that appears on the inside cover and is addressed to Zitkala Sa from Helen Keller.

The letter is dated 25 August, 1919, and is clearly intended to advertise Zitkala Sa's earlier publication of Sioux tales, Old Indian Legends (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1901). Keller praises Zitkala Sa's talents for translating the Sioux tales in a "way that will keep them alive in the hearts of men." Though one might understand the editorial decision not to reprint a letter that advertises another book, or to eliminate an essay that is itself a reprint, it is a shame that Rio Grande Press has chosen to do so in this instance because both function as bookends to Zitkala Sa's literary career. She moved from folktales to autobiography, from personal narrative to political essays.

The preface is itself another curious aspect of this edition. With its anachronistic references to the Redman and the Whiteman, the tone is reminiscent of certain white reader attitudes that might have been common in 1900 but not, one would hope, in 1980. A reference to Omar Khayam and the Rubaiyat seems a total non-sequitur, and the biographical data provided is sketchy at best.

Even with these weaknesses the Rio Grande Press has rendered a service to students of American Indian Literature by reprinting American Indian Stories, because it represents one of the earlier efforts by a Native American woman to write in English about her own experiences and beliefs without the aid of a collaborator. That Zitkala Sa was independent enough to write about her "varying moods" is a credit to her and a bonus for anyone interested in some of the impulses that launched an

American Indian Literary tradition in English.

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Dexter Fisher
New York, New York

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Blackrobe: Isaac Jogues by Maurice Kenny,
illustrated by Kahionnes (John Fadden)
North Community College Press 12.95 cloth
6.95 paper

In BLACKROBE: ISAAC JOGUES, the Mohawk Indian poet Maurice Kenny approaches a historical subject of extreme importance to his tribe. But the story of Jogues (1604-1646), the ill-fated Jesuit missionary to the Iroquois nation, takes on a broader significance in Kenny's telling. The poem reveals the human failures --the blind arrogance and misunderstanding of even the well-meaning, the ambiguity of evil--that characterizes white-Indian relations as they were established throughout the continent.

Kenny tells his story in non-linear fashion, through a series of persona poems in which he re-imagines the thoughts and feelings of not only Jogues, but his conniving European religious superiors, various Indian figures who react to him, and later historical personages whose fate in one way or another derives from the blackrobe. The structural approach for this long poem helps to create its integrity, as Jogues' story unfolds through the various voices in a kind of simulated oral history adapted from Native American tradition. Kenny's use of multiple voices enables him to suggest nuances, ambiguities, and multiple levels of significance embodied in Jogues' imagination.

An early poem in the sequence, quoted in its entirety below, conveys Jogues' first impressions of the St. Lawrence River, and with them we sense the single-(read narrow) mindedness,

elaborated in other poems, that proves his undoing:

Blue as Mary's skirt.
Cold as the heathen heart.
Clear as my purpose.
Abundant as fish.

Jogues projects his biases here more that he observes facts. We see that the Indians he meets do not initially greet him with cold hearts. On the contrary, Kiosaeton, the Mohawk chief he first encounters, is impressed by Jogues' religious sincerity and grants him permission to live, preach, and try to heal people in the villages, where the smallpox brought by his fellow Europeans is widespread. Kiosaeton assures the blackrobe safety and hospitality, asking only that he observe the normal propriety of any guest among a foreign people:

You are in safe
country with my people
who will respect your customs
and invite you into the lodge
if you maintain respect for ours.

Jogues, however, is unable to live up to this simple mutuality.

I openly refute their foolish tales
that the world was built on a turtle's back.
I try to reason that the sun possesses
no intelligence...

Jogues' unflagging efforts inevitably lead to his death --a martyrdom, in his terms, --for the sake of, and at the hands of the Indian souls who resist his teachings.

Jogues' single-mindedness blinds him to the political and economic ramifications of his mission, which Kenny introduces through the

voices of the explorer LaSalle, the Dutch burgher Van Colear, the Father Superior of New France Vimont, and the Cardinal Richelieu. Their testimony, interspersed throughout the poem, tilts its perspective, and gives us glimpses of Jogues as a pawn in a larger game. These more worldly figures find Jogues' simple-minded saintliness somewhat perplexing but ultimately useful, and they are perfectly willing to let his personal drama act itself out to its bloody end as long as it serves their purposes.

Jogues emerges not as an evil man, just a foolish one. As his main antagonist, Bear, puts it, he is "stupid in the way all saints are." Kenny's multiple Indian voices, some of whom are open and friendly to the strange blackrobe, underscore the moral ambiguity of Jogues' efforts. We ultimately sense Jogues' mission as self-indulgent, a tragically missed opportunity, since his ecstatic embracement of martyrdom precludes chances for a life-affirming exchange between cultures. As Bear observes, "there is blood on that cross he wears around his neck."

Kenny presents diverse Indian viewpoints. Bear embodies the resistant response which ultimately wins out, and views Jogues as a threat to the very foundations of Iroquois culture and as an ally to his more overtly warlike countrymen. Others see Jogues as harmless, and find his otherworldliness, strangeness, and personal gentleness relatively attractive. He is accepted into clan and household, and develops relationships with people who remain loyal to the end. We witness not only Jogues' humanity, but the actual push and pull of opinions in the Iroquois' open society. Such a view is refreshing, for while openness to diverse opinions is typical of most Native American societies it is rarely central to the literature depicting them. Kenny's poem celebrates this quality, placing it in stark

contrast to the intolerance of the saintly Jogues and the other, less ethereal, European voices.

The flexibility of the multiple persona structure enables him to introduce later voices --those of the French economic interests, Kateri Tekawitha (the "Mohawk saint"), the Christianized chief Aroniateka (Hendrick), and the contemporary Mohawk poet and painter Rokwaho. These lend historical perspective to the attempt to interpret the meaning of Jogues' mission. For Tekawitha, Jogues is a vital and exemplary model. She follows him to his willful martyrdom, "to atone for the sins of my people," feeling "safe and warm and satisfied with the food of the Holy Ghost." For Rokwaho, on the other hand, Jogues is the source of the evil now plaguing the Mohawk nation:

From his prayers flowed the death of
salmon and trout in mercury pools.

Although Kenny's sentiments are more with Rokwaho, he does not push the point, letting the reader form a perception from the varied testimonies. More than in laying blame he is interested in mapping the missed and crossed communications, the complexities and sometimes benignness of evil, and the lack of human perception and consensus which too often allows evil to prevail. Jogues is revealed as a victim of these processes, as are the tribal peoples whose burdens he presumes to ease.

Blackrobe: Issac Jogues represents a significant new direction for Kenny as a poet. He is no longer "on the warpath," as one reviewer characterized a stance that is, in truth, more complex. Like Simon Ortiz in From Sand Creek, Kenny's poem represents a movement away from anger and toward compassion, in an attempt to understand clearly the lessons of history. If Kenny presents no simple solutions, he appreciates nuance, complexity,

and multiplicity. What is affirmed in the poem is human diversity, even the diversity of those who would deny others their right to be diverse.

This affirmation is accomplished with virtually no rhetorical flourishes, but implicitly, largely through the use of the multiple persona strategy. As Kenny makes no direct judgements of any of the speakers, he conveys a sense of equal respect granted to each. This egalitarianism and respect for the distinctive identities and views of others, expressed by some of the Indian voices' openness to Jogues' humanity and reinforced by the poem's form, stands in stark contrast to the views and actions of the whites. In upholding the value of respect for human diversity, Kenny remains true to his Native American heritage. Blackrobe stands with his I Am The Sun as one of his most ambitious and fully realized poems.

Turtle, a character who like Bear is intended to personify the Mohawk clan of the same name, prophesizes toward the end of the poem that, "Someday they will come to learn...not to teach." Books like this, and its readers, can help bring such a vision, (and its radical implications for the American character), to life.

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Michael Castro, St. Louis

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Hail! Nene Karennia, The Hymn, by Bruce Burton. Security Dupont Publishing, 617 Sibley Tower Bldg, Rochester, NY 14604. 292 pp. cloth

The problem of novelists who have attempted to create historical/biographical novels of Indian heroes, such as Thomas Berger with Little Big Man, Dee Brown with Creek Mary's Blood, John G. Niehardt with When The Tree Flowered, and my concern here, Burton's Hail! Nene Karennia, lies

first in humanizing the characters by using contemporary language. The novels of Brown and Hill suffer from their authors' sentimental romanticism in this humanizing. This is not so true with Berger, whose fiction is saved by biting satire, or with Niehardt or Burton. The latter has made an honest attempt to create a novel out of the rise and success of the Iroquois League of Five Nations through the combined genius of Deganawidah and Ayonwatha. He has used facts known to scholarship. But therein lies the chief flaw of Hail!. Burton's research is commendable, but a rich reimagining of the legend is dramatically lacking. This is not to suggest that there is no conflict, and occasionally Burton allows his passion to channel his intellect, his research ferments, and his wine takes on a pleasant taste. But the novel is obviously meant for the scholar. It is legitimate to seek a specialized audience, and Burton is not to be dismissed because he chooses not to exploit a mass market. But his choice obstructs a casual reader's pleasure in a work of "fiction."

For no apparent reason Burton frames his story of the law-givers Daganawidah and Ayonwatha with the character of a "sailor of Norman-French descent," who arrives on the scene completely fluent in the language of the Hurons and totally acquainted with their customs and rites. This is very strange. Not that Europeans might not have been in that vicinity trading at that time, but this "Norman" seems a subterfuge for delaying the entrance of the Peacemakers. The sailor's adoption into the Nation, his journey to war, his wanderings, and eventual capture by the Onondagas has a certain interest, but it seems a story for another book.

The second section of Hail, "Stanza Two: Kawwhitehene: Spring 1560-1570 ("stanza" suggests poetry, though this novel is not in the lyrical tradition of fiction) deals with

the Norman's life as a captive in an Onondaga village, where he encounters not only Atotarho but Ayonwatha as well, and his escape and return to the Hurons. This section deals with Ayonwatha's middle years and his conflict with both his own soul/conscience and with Atotarho, chief leader of the Onondaga Nation, a cruel and vicious man sworn to war and consumed by his fetish for killer-snakes. Ayonwatha determines to rise above vicissitudes caused by the death of his family, and the extinction of his blood line, due to the murder of his pregnant daughter. He is converted to a peacemaker among all Iroquois peoples, who were then constantly warring with one another and threatening the destruction of their culture. But Ayonwatha, through Atotarho's machinations, is forced to flee; and exiled in the wilds, he connects with the Gaienhagahs ("the people of the flint" --Mohawks). His travels through the Adirondacks are forcefully portrayed, as is his genial confrontation with Deganawidah, the Peacemaker.

Deganawidah, a man with a profound speech impediment, perhaps a strong stutter, is in need of a spokesperson for his new philosophical/political vision for reform. Ayonwatha is a proven orator of renown. He is to spread the word, ignite all peoples of the common language of Iroquois to demand that Atotarho bury the hatchet, rid himself of snakes, and become the royaner (he who lays down a good path) for the newly formed league. Here is the central conflict of Hail: to convince Atotarho to take off the crown of snakes, to commence the central fire of the League of Onondaga village, and to implement peace between all Iroquois people. We learn much about Atotarho: to the end he seems soiled. Those snakes never seem to leave his hair. Ayonwatha is perhaps too saintly here, in need of a little dirt to be more convincing. Deganawidah remains shrouded in a mystifying mist, as though Burton were

intimidated by the myth himself. A rich legend it is, which should excite, not frighten, a novelist. But the founder of the incredible Great League of Nations fails to arouse Burton to accept the challenge of producing an epic, an important history, a chronicle of a people whose culture is still vibrant, though tarnished by European contact, as it was when Ayonwatha crossed the Adirondacks to consummate that resilient code that international leaders might well study today for the survival of life on earth. There is no doubt that Burton so aspired. His story successfully builds to Deganawidah, who is yet not a fully drawn character in the novel, a novel which attempts realism and turns away from a surrealistic approach to legend.

Hail possesses admirable qualities, such as the author's belief in the importance of the League, and his avoiding the James Fenimore Cooper syndrome, or Ruth Hill sentimentalizing. Burton's lines often flow freshly, his images sometimes bristle and ignite vivid descriptions. He knows the lay of the land, and he has made an intensive study of the Iroquois. Hail! may be recommended for itself, and it can also be suggested as a complementary piece to Paul A.W. Wallace's White Roots of Peace, (North Country Community College Press, Saranac Lake, N.Y. 12983, \$10, cloth) which is another retelling of the brilliant legend of Deganawidah and Ayonwatha.

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Maurice Kenny

Editor, Strawberry Press, Contact II

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Andrew Wiget complained that the final sentence of his review of The South Corner of Time (Sail, 7:2) was misleadingly condensed, and we agree that in justice to him and to Sun Tracks his full conclusion deserves to be restored: "To achieve any one of these ends would make any book valuable. To substantially accomplish

them all makes The South Corner of Time indispensable to own and a model to imitate."

We seize the opportunity to apologize to all reviewers and reviewees who have suffered from either our technological ineptness or our need to save space. Happily, however, we believe we have funds for expansion. Already planned for next year are five issues plus special poetry collections by leading Native American poets. Full details will appear in SAIL, 8:1, so renew now for the big bargain of 1984, five numbers for four dollars and first chance at the Native American Poets Series.

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