

ASAIL NEWSLETTER

% NAVAJO COMMUNITY COLLEGE, TSAILE, CHINLE, AZ 86503 JANUARY 1974

The Association for Studies in American Indian Literatures was formed at the Seminar on Native American Literatures at MLA in New York in December, 1972. The group asked me to serve as chairman and I asked Leslie Silko, then of Navajo Community College, and Larry Evers, then a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Chicago, to serve as vice-chairman and Wayne Franklin to serve as Secretary. I found myself in Mexico, Leslie Silko went to Alaska, and we never got far with the Newsletter. Now I am at Navajo Community College, Larry Evers is soon to be at the University of Arizona, and Wayne Franklin is at the University of Iowa. We should be able to get out a newsletter every two months with some regularity, and good luck.

The second Seminar on Native American Literatures met at MLA in Chicago with me chairing and Wayne Franklin and Larry Evers assisting. The group included teachers of Native American Literature with a folklorist, a linguist, an anthropologist, etc; so the seminar was more representative of the people in the field than at the first meeting. Dr Bea Medicine was there from Native American Studies at Dartmouth. Of primary interest was how to teach American Indian Literature. Present problems include a lack of preparation on teachers assigned to teach a new course and a definite paucity of good materials. We had already been in touch with Professor Meserole, MIA Bibliography, and he has agreed to include a bibliography section as soon as we can get a team together. We have not done so as yet. Various existing texts were discussed and we will include reviews and notes on present texts and materials in the forthcoming issues. Dr Evers' article on anthologies is in this issue; there will be an article on periodicals, articles on Native American Studies Programs. I planned to do an article on miscellaneous books that had reached me lately (all dangerous in their ignorance), but I will leave that for a full-length review article in one of the next two issues. Suffice it to say that there are many books, in the present Indian limelight, which are done by amateurs and which include all of the mistakes of the past. We call upon all of you to help us by writing notes on new books and new printings of old books.

But our energies, for the present, will be concentrated on seeking out highly qualified people to bring out truly new texts, to do bilingual texts with new translations, to help with a helpfully annotated bibliography, to keep us informed on meetings which are of interest to all of us and to resources we can all use.

{2}

I am working on several projects which I can use all of the help I can get.

First there is the NEWSLETTER and, if funds are available, an annual issue of QUETZAL devoted to articles and reviews concerned with Native American Literatures and Philosophies.

Second I am working on a poets, storytellers, singers festival to be filmed here at Tsaille in June. We are seeking funding now. Larry Littlebird will film with his Indian crew of technicians. They are all professional filmmakers, but this will be their first major work together. Larry Littlebird is from Santo Domingo and is presently filmmaker in residence with the IAIA in Santa Fe.

Third I am thinking about an anthology that would be credible and honest. I would like to know what you would like an anthology of Native American Literatures to do. I am thinking it should be very selective rather than all-inclusive. There are too many cultures; there are too many differences between the Native American cultures and the dominating culture; Native American Literatures can not be honestly represented in isolation.

Fourth I am looking for SW Indian texts to pass along to the Museum of New Mexico Press: stories, chapbooks which might help understand literatures, bilingual short texts, materials for a SW Indian anthology. We are also looking for some funding for ASAIL. We need a typist and some money for mailing, etc. For now we are only asking for donations to help with mailing expenses, but we will appreciate it if you will help by giving us names, by, responding to what we print, by sharing your NESLETTER with others. Thank you.

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Wayne Franklin, Searetery, ASAIL, Assoc. Ed. NEWSLETTER, University of Iowa.

Larry Evers, with Wayne Franklin assisting, will be directing the Seminar on Native American Literatures at MLA in NYC in December. Contact them for information. ASAIL will meet at MLA, but we will try to get a representative to any other meeting where we might be of assistance. I am thinking of a Seminar on Contemporary Native American Literatures for MLA in December, more a critical response to Momaday, Leslie Silko, James Welch, Simon Ortiz and a discussion of what is happening now. I would like to know if this is of interest to anyone.

Randall W. Ackley
Tsaille, Navajo Nation

{3}

On Anthologies of Native North American Literatures

I begin with short comments on particular anthologies, then follow with some general, prejudicial remarks on the lot.

I

Armstrong, Virginia Irving, ed. I Have Spoken: American History through the Voices of Indians. Swallow, 1971. Paper, \$2.95. Chronological presentation of Indian oratory from Powhatan (1609) to Vine Deloria (1971). Given the time span and the occasions on which speeches were recorded, there is a decided emphasis on Indian-White relations. Fredrick Turner contributes an introductory essay on Indian history and the rhetorical strategy of some of the pieces.

Astrov, Margot ed. American Indian Prose and Poetry: An Anthology. [1946] Capricorn Press, 1962. Paper, \$2.45. Selections include short examples, often fragments, of poetry and prose from Central and South as well as North American groups taken from the anthropological collections. Occasionally the pieces are accompanied by useful annotations. Astrov's introduction discusses the translation problem at some length along with rambling talk about the influence of Christianity on the Indian and ends with a reminiscence of Christmas at San Filipe pueblo.

Bierhorst, John, ed. In the Trail of the Wind: American Indian Poems and Ritual Orations. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1972. Paper, \$2.45. Short poems from the anthropological collections arranged thematically--"The Beginning," "Home," "Dreams," etc. Includes the barest possible explanatory notes on the selections.

Brandon, William, ed. The Magic World: American Indian Songs and Poems. Morrow, 1971. Paper, \$2.50. Selections "adapted" from the usual anthropological sources. Though Brandon sees the material as alien to his audience-- "the Indian world was, and is, a world immensely alien to European tradition, more alien, really, than we can even yet quite realize," he maintains that "the poems can speak for themselves. They are presented here not as ethnological data but strictly as literature. There should be no more need to talk about the 'cultures' of the various American Indian groups than to preface Catullus with a discourse on ancient Rome." Therefore no notes.

Coffin, Tristram P., ed. Indian Tales of North America: An Anthology for the Adult Readers. American Folklore Society, 1961. Paper, \$4.00. A collection of narratives {4} previously published in the JAF arranged in three

thematic groupings: "The Way the World Is," "What Ran Must Know and Learn," and "The Excitement of Living." Cautioned by the editor that his point of view is "that of the litterateur using the admittedly ethnocentric and artificial point of view of the intelligent, curious Western European reader," we read in his introduction that "one quickly learns that the primitive mind is incapable of the subtleties and probings we have come to expect of our own narrators," that "the folk as a whole, and the primitive Indian particularly, are not capable of unifying their tales," and that "primitive minds, and so primitive stories, do not concern themselves with scientific, logical accuracy."

Cronyn, George W., ed. American Indian Poetry: An Anthology of Songs and Chants. [1918] Liveright, 1970. Paper, \$2.95. Selections from the anthropological collections available before 1918 arranged by culture areas. A section of poetic "interpretations" of Indian material by then contemporary Anglo poets, Teary Austin, Constance Lindsay Skinner, and others.

Day, A. Grove, ed. The Sky Clears: Poetry of the American Indians. University of Nebraska Press, 1994. Paper, \$1.75. Selections from the anthropological collections arranged by culture area interspersed with critical commentary by Day. Chapter One is a very useful critical essay on Indian poetry from a literary perspective, touching on most of the significant issues and surveying the anthropological and literary research to 1950. The bibliography at the end of the book is the most complete I've seen.

Henry, Jeanette, ed. The American Indian Reader: Literature. Indian Historical Press, 1973. Paper, \$3.00. One of five books in the series. Others are on anthropology, history, current affairs, and education. Sections on Native columnists, contemporary prose and poetry, critical approaches, as well as a few selections from the anthropological collections. Indian edited.

Marriot, Alice, and Rachlin, Carol K. American Indian Mythology. [1968] New American Library, 1972. Paper, \$1.25. All selections, collected by the editors themselves, are arranged thematically. Each selection prefaced by notes on the tribe by the editors.

Milton, John R., ed, The American Indian Speaks. Dakota Press, 1969. Paper, \$3.00.

_____, American Indian II. Dakota Press, 1971. Paper, \$3.00. First and best collections of contemporary Indian writing.

Rothenberg, Jerome, ed. Shaking the Pumpkin: Traditional Poetry of the Indian North Americas. Doubleday, 1972. Paper, \$3.95. All selections are "re-translated," {5} often as concrete poems. Organized as an elaborate religious

service, the readings represent an effort by Rothenberg to "reimagine" "primitive" literatures in the context of the modern world.

Sanders, Thomas and Peek, Walter W. Literature of the American Indian. Glencoe Press, 1973. \$9.75. The most ambitious, comprehensive, and expensive collection to date. The authors' commentary is often useful, always glib, and preoccupied with theological speculation. The sources of a high percentage of the selections are not given, presumably because they are public domain. The authors are Native Americans.

Thompson, Stith, ed. Tales of the North American Indians. [1929] Indiana University Press, 1966. Paper, \$2.95. Most complete anthology of oral prose, including the most complete bibliography and comparative notes on the same. From its organization by tale types to the lists of motifs, the book reveals Thompson's obsession for classification of the material in his Northern European system.

Witt, Shirley, and Steiner, Stan, eds. The Way: An Indian Anthology of American Indian Literature. Vintage, 1972. Paper, \$1.95. Historical and contemporary selections are largely focussed on the political themes laid out in Steiner's The New Indians.

There are a number of other anthologies in print which I don't have in hand at this time. Among them are: Ackley, Randall, and Bird, Leonard, eds. Quetzal: Southwest Poets' Conference '72. Quetzal/Vihio Press, 1972. Paper, \$2.00. A collection of contemporary poetry. Feldman, Susan, ed. The Storytelling Stone: Myths and Tales of the American Indians. Dell, 1965. Paper, \$.75. A kind of popular version of Stith Thomrson's collection. And Ken Rossen's recent collection of contemporary short stories published by Viking.

II

Following publication of Cronyn's anthology in 1918 Louis Untermeyer reviewed the book for The Dial (March 8, 10,19) and touched off a heated exchange between himself, Cronyn, and Mary Austin that stretched through the spring and summer of that year and might have continued, had not the editors been forced, in late August, to "regret that pressure of space on this department compels them to announce this discussion of Mr. Untermeyer's review is closed." The argument had a variety of ad hominem overtones: Untermeyer, "It is hard to say how much of the book should be credited to Mr. Cronyn, his share of the task is concealed to the point of mystery." Mary Austin, "That all these things, seen to have been missed by the reviewer raises again the question as to whether we can ever have anything which is American literature, sui generis, until literary judge-

{6} ment begins to be American and leaves off being thoroughly New Yorkish." But the central issues in the dispute remain with us today and with small imagination we might arrange all anthologists (and critics) of Native American literature, if not into two camps headed by Cronyn and Untermeyer, along a continuum between the two camps.

Writes Untermeyer, "If Mr. Cronyn is a genuine student of Indian folklore, he is to be blamed for not having made the volume more communicative and less cryptic; many of these songs cry aloud for nothing so much as footnotes. Nor is one assisted materially by the arbitrary arrangement of words and a pretentious typography that is foreign to our native--though it may be native to Ezra Pound, 'H. D.,' and Richard Adington"

Answers Cronyn "I have cherished a passionate distaste for footnotes ever since that wretched academic period when, for every line of poetry or drama read, one had to plough through a jungle of notes at the bottom of the page, or at the back of the book. It seemed to me then that there was only one creature more horrible and contemptible than the teacher who sandbagged poetry, and that was the editor who crucified it with unnecessary notes."

Untermeyer might today be speaking to the likes of Rothenberg, Brandon, and Bierhorst; Cronyn to Stith Thompson, if no one else. The issue is how are we to translate Native American literatures and, once translated, how are we to understand them. Solutions have been as varied as our uses for the material, though, I imagine, we all believe that reading and teaching Native American literary material will somehow broaden our own literary and cultural sensibilities, and those of our students. There are those with Brandon who would take only the "feeling" from the material and "let the ethnologists keep the rest." Others find in the often dry pages of the ethnologists the very information which helps them to "feel" in a culturally different way. Along the line between are those who feel that their own special critical set helps to make the literature at once comprehensible and useful. Among these, the theo-literary comments of Sanders and Peek, the politics of Witt and Steiner, the very personal ethnology of Marriot and Rachlin, and the poetics of Rothenberg. Approaches and uses are diverse.

My point will seem new to few. What we take away from, the literature is in large measure determined by the critical set we bring to it. Paul Radin brought Jungian psychology to the Winnebago trickster cycle and saw a drama of man's developing consciousness where a friend of Bob Sayre's (also an anthropologist, I recall) saw only "sex and shitting." Both can find support for their readings in the text; and both readings have their uses. Whatever anthology or collection we choose to use we should be aware of the editor's bias.

{7}

What then of my own bias? Though I don't like pedantry any more than Gronyn and though I agree with whomever John Greenway has quoted to the effect that reading footnotes is like running downstairs on one's wedding night to answer the doorbell, I don't see how literary productions of a culture can be properly understood without knowing something of the culture. An illustration. Sanders and Peek include in their anthology an Omaha story, "Adventures of Orphan," without any discussion of the culturally specific elements in the story. Merely to recognize the unity of the plot one needs to see that the story is a literary representation of the Omaha vision seeking experience (noⁿzhiⁿzhoⁿ) and is structured by the cultural rubrics for that experience. Further, it would be helpful to know that the individual vision quest was seen as a reenactment of the tribal emergence and that much of the detail in the story can be understood with reference to the oral narratives recounting that tribal emergence. The appearance of the Red Bird, the Eagle, the Buzzard, the Crow, and the Magpie in the story is not the result of a random choice of birds by the narrator but is in a real sense a choice dictated by Omaha literary conventions. Not only do Sanders and Peek not discuss the cultural context of the piece, they fail to even identify the source from which the story comes so that the reader can find the information to work out the context for him/ herself. And finally, there is no indication given that the story is still told on the Omaha reservation today, a fact that would at the very least help readers to recognize that oral literatures are something besides historical curiosities. The same sort of criticism might be directed at most of the anthologists.

In my opinion, any of the anthologies have a place in the classroom only when they are accompanied by a more in-depth discussion of the literature of at least one of the tribes they anthologize in the context of what we know of the cultural and literary traditions of that tribe. Except in the relatively rare case where an instructor has access to a willing and knowledgeable member of that tribe, this means going to the ethnological and folkloristic studies on that tribe. The effort is worthwhile.

Larry Evers
Montrose, Colorado

{8}

ASAIL Meeting at the MLA Convention

During the MLA Meeting in Chicago (December 27-29), ASAIL sponsored a Seminar on Native American Literatures, in which about twenty-five people participated. This meeting, like previous MLA Seminars on the subject, was informal, but certain basic concerns evolved during it. Randall Ackley spoke, to begin with, on his success in various projects during the past year. Some anthologies of "World Lit." now include Indian materials, and Harrison Meserole, MLA Bibliographer, has agreed to include entries on Indian Literatures in future PMLA Bibliographies. There are plans, within ASAIL itself, to prepare these entries for Meserole, as well as to extend our own Newsletter so that it will carry bibliographical and critical reviews and other helpful articles. In addition, Randall hopes to renew, perhaps under ASAIL auspices, publication of Quetzal, the literary journal he has issued on his own in the past. All of these positive expansions in ASAIL activities speak to what surely was the biggest single issue of concern at the Seminar. The greatest problem facing the teacher of Indian literatures is the utter lack of comprehensive critical and bibliographical guides, and those participating in our meeting felt that preparing such guides ought to be one of our first jobs. (The Newsletter accordingly will carry brief articles aimed at filling this need). An overall "Preface to Indian Literatures" remains still a desideratum.

As potential or actual teachers of Indian literatures, most of the participants in the Seminar offered comments on methods and approaches which were helpful to them. Larry Evers, ASAIL Vice-Chairman, remarked on the great usefulness of having "tellers" come into the classroom. Others spoke of the availability of films based on Indian legends, or of such temporary resources as the traveling exhibit of American Indian Art which opened at the Metropolitan Museum in New York last year. We spoke, too, of other things--of Akwesasne Notes, The Indian Historian, and those "little magazines"(such as South Dakota Review)--which emphasize or even just recognize Indian authors.

It should be noted, in conclusion, that the real importance of the Seminar was the focus which it can give us for future work. The Newsletter will begin to carry materials designed to fill the needs expressed by our members, and it hopefully will bring some order (as well as some discrimination) into the field. Hence the fullest record of what happened at the MLA Meeting will be found in these and future pages.

Wayne Franklin, Secretary