



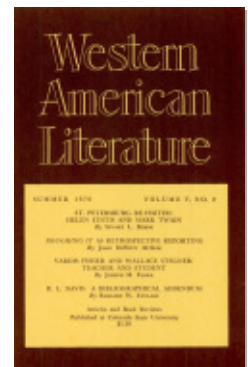
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The Editor's Essay Review

Western American Literature, Volume 5, Number 2, Summer 1970, pp. 166-169
(Review)

Published by University of Nebraska Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/wal.1970.0003>



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The Editor's Essay Review

The past decade has seen a remarkable emergence of the American Indians. The founding in 1961 of The National Indian Youth Council and more recently the American Indian Historical Society with its quarterly journal, *The Indian Historian*, are only two of the many encouraging signs that an Indian renaissance is in the making.

For centuries countless knowledgeable students have written about various tribes of Indians, but with no very noticeable resultant general understanding among non-Indians of the richness, vitality, and diversity of Indian culture. Students of western American literature, it seems to me, must place an understanding and appreciation of the Indians in the forefront of their concerns; for life in the West, out of which the literature emerges, has been pervaded by the Indians—as Oliver LaFarge, Frank Waters, Frederick Manfred, Jack Schaefer, and Mari Sandoz—to name a few—have demonstrated in their writings.

Two of the most impressive books about Indians I have ever read are at once penetrating cultural history and hard-hitting social criticism. No one can read these manifestoes and ever return to his old complacency about Indians.

Custer Died For Your Sins. By Vine Deloria, Jr. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1969. 279 pages, \$5.95.)

The New Indians. By Stan Steiner. (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1968. xii + 348 pages, map, illus., appendices, biblio., and index, \$2.45.)

Deloria, who is three-eighths Sioux, brings an interesting background and experience to the writing of his book: four years of study in a divinity school beyond his bachelor's degree followed by a law degree. He has been Executive Director of the National Congress of American Indians and has studied the problems of "Indians Today, the Real and the Unreal" about as thoroughly as anyone. He is relentless in his chapter on American treaties with the Indians and wittily and biting satiric in his chapters revealing the ineptitude of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the presumption and condescension of the churches in their missionary activities among the Indians. Likely the most surprising chapter to most readers is "Indian Humor" since it is generally supposed that Indians have no humor.

In the chapter, "The Red and The Black," Deloria analyzes the main differences between the struggles of Indians and Negroes for social realization; and in the remaining four chapters he assesses the urgency of current Indian problems because of the growing awareness of the young. He suggests organization and procedures for the young Indian movement, and he serves notice on government agencies, anthropologists, and the churches as to what they may—and may not—do to Indians. At times in reading the book I felt Deloria

was excessively harsh in his denunciations of White America—I no longer think so.

Steiner, I presume, is not Indian, but his book proves that he can portray with understanding and sympathy the debasement of tribal culture among the Indians that is the result of centuries of outrageous governmental policies. Steiner is thorough and meticulous in describing with full documentation the current Indian movement among its young people: as “. . . an entire generation beginning a journey between two worlds.” The appendices, with names, address, history, and current data about the Indian movement, make the book especially useful.

The preservation of Indian myths and legends continues to be one of the most notable areas of literary scholarship.

The Way to Rainy Mountain. By N. Scott Momaday. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969. 89 pages, illus., \$4.95.)

Sweet Medicine. By Peter J. Powell. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969. Volume I, xxxvii + 428; Volume II, xi + 503 pages, illus., maps, biblio., index, boxed, \$25.00.)

Momaday, a Kiowa Indian, is a well-known poet, author of the Pulitzer Prize novel, *House Made of Dawn*, and a professor of comparative literature at the University of California, Berkeley. In *The Way to Rainy Mountain* he is recounting—in three voices—the legendary journey of the Kiowas some three hundred years ago from the headwaters of the Yellowstone across the northern plains and then south to Oklahoma. On the way the Kiowas acquired their god, Tai-me, and their lives were thus dramatically changed. They were also transformed into fierce warriors when they acquired the horse.

In each of the twenty-four sections he also recalls historic events in the Kiowa nation and finally reveals his personal memories with at least three generations of his Kiowa ancestors. The book is a memorable evocation of one's heritage, and it is written in some of the best prose I have read in many years. The book is charmingly illustrated with numerous paintings by the author's father. It is an outstanding Indian literary achievement.

Powell is an Anglo Catholic priest from Chicago, who with the encouragement and help of Mari Sandoz began fourteen years ago the field work which has resulted in this superb two-volume study. After reading a vast amount of what then had been written about the Northern Cheyennes, Powell went to stay with them in 1956. “I went,” he says, “able to say to them that I believe their sacred ways to have come from God Himself. I continue to believe, with the Cheyennes, in the supernatural power that flows from their sacred bundles and sacred ceremonies.” It is no wonder, therefore, that Powell

has won the complete confidence of the Cheyennes and has been invited to participate in their most sacred ceremonies: rituals involving the Sacred Arrows Bundle, the Sacred Buffalo Hat, and the Sun Dance itself.

The first volume recounts the development of their sacred traditions and the major aspects of their religious life from historic times to the present. Both volumes are profusely illustrated with the most authentic photographs possible of the Cheyennes participating in every phase of their rituals. This is a remarkably detailed, authoritative, sympathetic study of the Cheyenne religion which is for them and the author both vital and divine.

Songs and legend-stories, often handed down for several centuries through oral tradition, reveal most directly the Indians' basic values and their tastes in theme, tone, and imagery. Two very interesting books in this area have recently been published. Both authors lived among the Indians they studied, have made original translations of songs and tales, and have provided interpretative discussion of the materials.

Songs of the Teton Sioux. By Harry W. Paige. (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1970. xv + 201 pages, illus., biblio., index, \$7.50.)

Tanaina Tales From Alaska. By Bill Vaudrin. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969. xxxvi + 153 pages, illus., \$4.95.)

Paige is another scholar who believes the rich body of literature preserved in the oral tradition is worthy of scholarly study; and this book, based upon his doctoral dissertation, is he says, "the first literary study of the oral expression of the Sioux and the "Plains Indians." The purpose of most Sioux songs is "to obtain the ritualistic and individual *power* necessary to exert control over the mysterious forces of the environment, and thus insure the Indian's welfare, prosperity, and even survival."

The songs in conjunction with other rituals employed by the Sioux to achieve a harmonious relationship with the spirit world and particular gods reminded me throughout the book of Homeric Greeks and the ancient Hebrews. Odysseus' libations to the gods and his dependence on Athena and David's dancing and singing are kin to the Sioux songs—and are likely no older nor more deeply revered. This illuminating study concludes with modern songs having to do with such recent cultural changes among the Sioux as the Ghost Dance, Peyotism, and the *Yuwipi* Cult.

Vaudrin is a young Chippewa Indian from Minnesota who now teaches English in the Alaska Methodist University. He wintered several years with the Tanaina Indians of Pedro Bay and Nondallon villages, hunting, fishing, and trapping with them. He collected and translated the folk tales which they have long retold, mainly for entertainment. Most of the tales are essentially

fables for they describe animals revealing the foibles of human beings. Two of my favorite stories in the collection are "The Mink Story," and "The Trout Story," which like the others have none of the religious depth of the Sioux songs but even in the violation by the animals of Tanaina values are used for instruction as well as amusement. The raven, the trickster, is apparently very popular among them.

Indian and White: Sixteen Eclogues. By Winston Weathers. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970. xx + 105 pages, \$3.95.)

The eclogues in this volume are, the author says, "prose in form, poetic in spirit." They constitute a very significant evocation of Weathers' native region centered at Pawhuska, Oklahoma, capital town of the Osage nation. His theme has consistently been—though he did not consciously intend it—"the passage of time," "the alteration of place," "the having had and now the loss." The emotional, sensuous, and philosophical depth with which he portrays the Osage life he knew at first hand and the long reaches back into tradition alone make this volume a unique imaginative achievement. But the added dimension of the white man's incursions into this Indian world gives an historic focus to the conflict of cultures which has characterized life in the Southwest for five hundred years.

American Indian Medicine. By Virgil J. Vogel. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970. xx + 583 pages, illus., appendix, biblio., index, \$12.50.)

Much has been written on Indian medicine, but almost all of it emphasizes the shamanistic aspect. Vogel admits that ritual played an important part in Indian curing procedures, but he is concerned in this work to show how extensive and significant were what is called their "rational procedures," their uses of indigenous botanical drugs. His main purpose, in fact, is to show the effect of Indian medicinal practices on white civilization: "About 170 drugs which have been or still are official in the *Pharmacopeia of the United States of America* or the *National Formulary* were used by North American Indians north of Mexico, and about fifty more were used by Indians of the West Indies, Mexico, and Central and South America." The last half of the volume is an appendix listing and describing these American Indian contributions to pharmacology. The book is a valuable reference for general readers and imaginative writers as well.