WHAT IS NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURE?

JANETTE K. MURRAY
Box 471,
Custer, South Dakota,
U.S.A., 57730.

ABSTRACT/RESUME

The author reviews some trends in literature by and about North American Native people. After noting the importance of language and culture in any corpus of literature, she considers oral traditions and books about Native people written or edited by Euro-Americans. She then reviews a number of works by Native writers.

L'auteur revoit quelques paragraphes de litterature au suject des gens qui sont nés Amerique du Nord. Après avoir noté l'importance de la langue et la culture de n'importe quels corps de litérature, elle considère les traditions orales et les livres au sujet de gens autochtones écrits ou édités par les Euro-Americains. Ensuite elle sense un grand nombre d'ouvrages écrits par des indiens.

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Scholars who study literature, like scientists who study the natural world, classify what they study. Literature is classified into genres, eras, and further into stylistic modes such as Gothic, comic, or Roman a'clef. There is a purpose to this classification that goes beyond organizing one's library. Classification aids the reader by setting up certain expectations and by providing guides for interpretation. Classification requires that the literature be defined and that certain rules be followed. For example, if one picks up a novel, one expects it to contain plot, characters, and setting.

Beginning with these simple, essential characteristics of literature, the literary critic embarks on a more complex journey. Critical exposition of a particular piece of literature is like a travel guide of a region. Having covered the terrain previously by studying similar works, the critic can alert the reader to certain nuances and depths of interpretation he might otherwise miss.

Such guides can be very useful indeed; however, there are also pitfalls which must be carefully avoided. Just as one chooses a guide who has had experience in the wild, one must also choose a critic who knows his literary territory. The experienced hunting guide has maps and the wisdom and knowledge of other explorers to guide him the critic has literary categories and the tools and techniques of literary criticism.

In this essay I propose to examine how the definition and classification of literature has been applied to the particular group of works known as Native American Literature. This is not a review of the best and the brightest, but some representative examples will be cited.

The primary questions are as follows: Should Native American Literature be defined, categorized, and analysed in the same way as other literature? Are there linguistic and cultural differences which influence interpretation? What is the role of the Native American as an interpreter of literature?

I will begin with yet another question: What does the term Native American Literature mean? Literature, according to standard definition, refers to "Written works collectively, especially those of enduring importance, exhibiting imagination and artistic skill." Furthermore, literature can also refer to a particular period, language, or country, such as "Elizabethan literature." English literature is easily accommodated by this definition. It is literature written in the English language, albeit, some early pieces such as *Beowulf* cannot be read easily by the modern reader. Although modern English literature can be all literature written in English, it is most often classified by the country of origin of the author: American Literature, British Literature, and Canadian Literature. Can this same system of classification based on common language and country of origin be used to describe Native American Literature?

THE LANGUAGE OF LITERATURE

In the first place, as one expects, English literature is written in the English language. Is, then, American Indian literature written in the American Indian language? No, it is not. There is no American Indian language in the same sense that there is an English language. The languages of the Native Americans include

more than fifty language families and hundreds of distinct languages. These Indian languages of different family groups are not mutually intelligible. Geographic proximity and even cultural similarity does not necessarily correspond to linguistic affiliation. Since language is the very core of literature, it is important to understand some basic facts about Native languages.

Linguists classify languages according to their grammatical structure and vocabulary as evidenced in the spoken language. Several systems of classification of Native American languages have been suggested. According to J.W. Powell, who compiled the research of ethnologists and linguists working for the Bureau of American Ethnology during the nineteenth century, Native languages can be classified into fifty-eight major families. In a more recent version of classification, Harry Holier has suggested fifty-four major families (Holder, 1966).

Anthropologists use another method of classification by cultural area and tribe. This latter method is also used by editors of Native American Literature anthologies. For example, Stith Thompson, in Tales of the North American Indian, shows nine major divisions with ten to twenty tribes listed in each division. The major areas are Eskimo, MacKenzie River, Plateau, North Pacific Coast, California, Plains, Woodland, Southeastern, and Southwestern. As an example, the tribes listed in the Plains are Paiute, Shoshoni, Ute, Comanche, Kiowa, Wichita, Osage, Arapaho, Cheyenne, Oto, Omaha, Ponca, Pawnee, Dakota (Sioux, Teton), Hidatsa, Mandan, Arikara, Blackfoot, Piegan, Sarcee, Gros Ventre, Plains Cree, Plains Ojibway, Assiniboine, and Bungee. Obviously, this kind of geographic classification does not correspond to language families. The tribes listed above as Plains represent the following language families: Shoshonean, Kiowan, Caddoan, Siouan, and Algonquian. Bungee is not a separate tribe, but another name for the language of the Plains Ojibway.

What is the significance of the diversity of North American Indian languages? First, there is no commonality of expression for all tribes. Sign language was primarily a vehicle of trade used in the western lands and generally not for casual conversation, and certainly not for literary works. It is somewhat ironic that the modern observer is most likely to encounter a demonstration of Indian sign language when an "Indian Princess" does the Lord's Prayer at a public gathering.

Second, tribes do not share a common literary heritage in the same way that English speaking people study the works of Chaucer and Shakespeare. Tribal literatures (including oral traditions of stories, legends, myths, etc.) are unique and culturally specific. Although such stories, legends, and so on can be translated, they will have no special significance for the members of a different tribe. Each tribe has acquired, during long stretches of time, its own peculiar way of expressing itself due to the formative influences of individual disposition, group configuration, and natural environment (Astrov, 1962:4). The language of the tribe, especially during story-telling, not only influences behavior, but also reflects a customary response and attitude (Ibid. :6).

Third, uses of Native language repetitions and images of cultural significance can be understood to a certain extent, but the nuances of language seldom

survive translation. Trying to explain the subtlety of meaning is like trying to explain why a particular joke is funny. It can be done, but the results are not the same.

LITERATURE AS A REFLECTION OF CULTURE

For the general reader, however, the major interest is in the tale itself after it has been translated into English. Even in translation the same tale from different tribes will not be identical. These differences are quite significant because they indicate the importance of particular beliefs as well as stylistic preferences. For example, many of the Plains tribes have versions of the trickster tales. For the Dakota and Lakota, it is the antics of *Iktomi* (translated as the spider); for the Kiowa it is the coyote. Certainly there are certain similarities between some stories, just as there are reoccurring themes and motifs in any literature, but scholars on the eternal quest for the universal Native American tale can just as well abandon their search; it doesn't exist.

Reports of tales began as early as 1633 when Jesuit Fathers came into contact with various tribes. Tales were reported sporadically during the next two centuries by travellers and explorers. Not until the second quarter of the nineteenth century did a considerable body of this folk-lore become available to the reading public. For example, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft reported the legends of the Ojibway and their neighbors. The popularization of Indian tales also meant that the recorder freely interpreted the material. Schoolcraft reportedly "reshaped the stories to suit his own literary taste" (Thompson, 1968:xv).

In studying Native American Literature, one is dependent on the abilities of the translator. It is a bit of a dilemma since a mere literal translation can not convey the full meaning, but too much invention distorts the original. If one reads the speeches of Indian orators in anthologies such as *I Have Spoken or Touch the Earth,* one is struck by certain similarities of phrasing and metaphors used by speakers as diverse as Red Jacket, a Seneca Chief, and Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce. This is not because the Indian leaders used the same language, but because the government translators spoke the same language - a kind of eighteenth and nineteenth century jargon born in the Peace Councils and perpetuated in the Treaty Proceedings. The "As-long-as-the-sun-shall-shine" language is no more authentic as Indian language than is the "Me-seek-peace-with-the-Great-White-Father" language of the Hollywood movie.

The pleasure of literature, especially poetry, depends on certain unstated signals which allow the poet and the listener to participate in a shared world of imagination. Some Indians were particularly skilled in creating very short songs which held a great deal of meaning for those who shared the Indian's world of experience. "These short songs . . . may be regarded as mnemonic summaries of trains of thought familiar both to the singer and to the listener (Astrov, 1962:5). The Papago song about an eagle is an example.

The eagle sings:

The sun's rays
Lie along my wings
and stretch beyond their tips.

A grey little whirlwind
Is trying to catch me.
Across my path
It keeps whirling.
(Ibid.: 16)

The poem has excellent images and suggests the eagle's lofty and majestic presence, but is that all the poem means? According to Dr. Ruth Underhill, the translator, a Papago would explain the poem in the following manner: "[He would] visualize the eagle with all his peculiarities. Thus his power is asserted, and being what he is, the superior of man, he will cleanse man from impurities, free him from disease, and ward off death" (Ibid.). But, what, one may ask, does the song mean to a non-Indian who has never shared the experience?

Fortunately, most teachers have become more sophisticated in handling Native American stories than in the past. "The Song of Hiawatha" is no longer considered adequate representation of the Indian in literature and cultural context is generally regarded as important in the understanding and interpretation.

ORAL TRADITION VERSUS THE WRITTEN WORD

Most anthologies of Native American Literature begin with what is called "Oral Literature." Even though the student has no difficulty in understanding what is meant, it is a poor descriptor. Literature by definition is written and intended to be read. Oral Literature can include myths, legends, songs and chants, and even speeches. Furthermore, the Oral Literature was composed and intended to be heard by listeners who shared the Native language and culture.

Some songs have particular significance as elements of ritual. It is quite important that the singer chant the words in a patterned way. The chanted word is expected to exert a strong influence and to bring about a change in the singer himself, in his fellow beings, in nature, and even in the universe.

Margot Astrov points out in the introduction to her book, American Indian Prose and Poetry (1962) that one may group the songs according to their purpose or what they intend to influence. The Indian believed, she writes, that the "word is power." These songs, then, may be grouped as 1) songs of healing, 2) individual songs, 3) songs of growth or germination, 4) songs of vision and dream, 5) songs or death. These songs have been translated into English, but, of course, in English they retain none of their original purpose - the power is lost. How accurately they reflect the essence of the original song, then, depends on the skill of the translator and the cultural knowledge of the reader.

The tales, myths, legends, and stories are also derived from the oral tradition. Stith Thompson classified the tales according to their similarities in mean-

ing and intent. Although he indicates there is a great variety of stories, he uses a series of categories, l) Mythological stories: These stories deal with the world before it was in the present state. They explain the origins of animals, or tribes, or objects, or ceremonies, the universe itself. 2) Trickster tales: These tales related the deeds of the trickster. Sometimes the buffoon is a human being, but more often he is an animal endowed with human characteristics. 3) Hero tales: These tales represent the lives of human beings under conditions at least remotely resembling the present. Transformations, magic, otherworld journeys, ogres, and beast marriages are common, but the characters are thought of as distinctly human. 4) Miscellaneous tales: There are other tales which are definitely borrowings from Europeans and from the Bible. These tales are somewhat like the myths of the Greeks, but animals figure more prominently in the Indian stories. Some, especially the hero tales, greatly resemble the European fairy tales (Thompson, 1968:xvii). They are all very interesting and entertaining to read, hut one wonders how much more meaningful the tale would be if he were familiar with the people who told the tale and the reasons they told it. Although one can appreciate the repetitions and the imagery of some of the songs, the cleverness and the wit of the tales, one finds little in his own experiences (real or literary) which will allow him to evaluate the works as literature.

Fortunately there is another approach and that is to look to the system of classification and definition suggested by the tribal members. Such explanations are not to be found in the introductions to anthologies written by non-Indian literary scholars, hut instead in the works of ethnologists and anthropologists.

For example, in the introduction to *Tales of the North American Indian,* Stith Thompson has written that there is no real difference in the use of the terms "tales, myths, legends, and stories" in reference to Indian literature (Ibid.:xv). Yet for the Native American there can be a great deal of difference. Ella Deloria, a Dakota well-known for her work in linguistics and Dakota stories, points out that the Dakota classification system was included as a part of the story itself, because it was very important to the interpretation. In the introduction to her collection of 64 tales entitled *Dakota Texts,* she explains that she has arranged the stories according to Dakota categories, in two parts, each of which is further divided into two parts, making four groups in all.

> The first 39 tales are intended to amuse and entertain, but not to be believed. All such stories end with the conventional *hehayela. owihake* - that is all; that is the end. They may be narrated only after sunset. To our minds, they are a sort of hang-over, so to speak, from a very, very remote past, from a different age, even from an order of beings different from ourselves. These tales include mythological characters. Iktomi is one of these. In everyday speech, constant allusion is made to them. For example, "He is playing Iktomi" is understood to mean that a person is posing as a very agreeable fellow to get what he wants.
>
> Stories of the second part are regarded as true. The conventional

> ohukaka ending disappears and instead, each tale closes with ske, "it is said"; and keyapi, "they say." These are stories which are accepted as having happened to our people in comparatively recent times, perhaps in the lifetime of the aged narrator's grandfather or great-grandfather (Deloria, 1932 :viii-x).

Few of us can learn a Native language in order to study the tribal literature. It would not be worth the effort anyway as so very few works are published in the Native languages, but we can learn to appreciate the literature better if we view the literature as an integral part of the culture from which it arises and learn to understand it from a cultural viewpoint. *Dakota Texts* is an excellent example of this approach.

Ella Deloria has presented each story as she recorded it from the original storyteller. She has written it in the Dakota or Lakota dialect, giving a literal translation, and a free translation. In addition, she has provided the reader with an excellent system of classification and interpretation. Reading these excellent tales one realizes immediately that they are worlds away from the "how the fox got his tail" variety of folklore often presented as Indian literature. Indeed there are classifications of Native American literature and they are of distinct purpose and function. Even the admonition that such tales could not be told after sunset had a particular function in Dakota cultural beliefs. Tribal members knowledgeable in the traditions of their culture are the best interpreters. Anthropologists are also useful resources.

BOOKS ABOUT INDIANS

To some people, Native American Literature means works written by non-Indians who have used Indian stories or Indian characters. There were some earlier writers, such as Helen Hunt Jackson, who knew Indians and presented them with authenticity. Jackson's Ramona (1884), for example, was sympathetic to the Indian and quite remarkable for its time, but now seems somewhat overstated.

Writers of the Helen Hunt Jackson variety were greatly overshadowed, however, by the sentimentalists and the sensationalists, who created the mythological American Indian. One of the first examples to come to mind is Longfellow's *Hiawatha*. Longfellow knew a great deal about the Iroquois and their legends. Unfortunately for the Iroquois, he also knew what played well with the American public. It comes as a surprise to some readers to learn that there was a real Hiawatha, or at least scholars think the character Longfellow used to build his fictitious character is the same legendary leader, who with his friend Deganawidah, founded the Iroquois League. In the Iroquois version, Hiawatha is a hero as well, but his heroism is defined in terms of Iroquois ideals - one of which is peaceful existence with one's neighbors. Not only did Longfellow distort the legend of Hiawatha, but readers also tend to identify with the least traditional elements in the story. "The courtship of Hiawatha and Minnehaha, the least 'Indian' of any of the events in 'Hiawatha, has come for many readers

to stand as the typical American Indian tale" (Thompson, 1968:xv; xvi). One could also list examples in the writings of George Fenimore Cooper, William Gilmore Simms and others who helped to develop the stereotype of the "noble savage" that is still with us today (Pearce, 1953:196-236).

One cannot overestimate the effects of the stereotyping of the American Indian on our society. The cliques of the dying warrior, the stoic hero, the mysterious stranger, or the comic drunk did not disappear as the last cavalry soldier rode off into the sunset. They are a part of American life which will never vanish. Even the pages of so-called "serious literature" are haunted by these specters of past glory and infamy.

It is not possible and certainly not desirable to examine the many books written about Indians. What is presented here is not even a representative sample. It is perhaps best described as the Good, the Not-So-Bad, and the Ugly.

In the Good category is an autobiographical account of Black Elk, an Oglala holy man recorded by John Neihardt. Black Elk Speaks is really more than a biography; it is an examination of the Lakota culture and religion from a particular point-of-view. In 1930 when Neihardt found Black Elk on the Pine Ridge reservation, he was already 67 years old and nearly blind. He asked Neihardt to return in the spring and he promised to tell the story of his life and the lives of his people. Neihardt did return a year later and for several days, with Black Elk's son translating, the old wicaska wakan spoke of the days of the battles between the Sioux and the whites. He also explained his visions and the "things of the Other World " (Neihardt, 1961:vii-xi). The life of Black Elk is so filled with adventure, it is hard to believe that it is not fiction. Black Elk was the son of a great holy man and a second cousin of Crazy Horse. His two companions, Fire Thunder and Standing Bear, also speak of the battles and the buffalo hunts. Black Elk tells about the days he spent travelling with Buffalo Bill in the Wild West Show. In 1886, he went with Buffalo Bill to England where he met Queen Victoria. He was amazed by the number of white people in the world and realized that they would easily overpower the Indians in their quest for land.

Fascinating as the accounts of journeys and battles are, the tremendous strength of Black Elk's faith in the natural world and supernatural world are even more impressive. His explanation of the hoop of the world and the central position of man in the universe presents a beautiful and harmonious concept of what life could have been for men on this continent. The most tragic and moving account in the book is his description of the Battle of Wounded Knee:

> I did not know then how much was ended. When I look back now from this high hill of my old age, I can still see the butchered women and children lying heaped and scattered all along the crooked gulch as plain as when I saw them with eyes still young. And I can see that something else died there in the bloody mud, and was buried in the blizzard. A people's dream died there. It was a beautiful dream. And I, to whom so great a vision was given in my youth - you see me now a pitiful old man who has done

> nothing, for the nation's hoop is broken and scattered. There is no center any longer, and the sacred tree is dead (Neihardt, 1961: 276).

Because Neihardt is a gifted poet, his language captures the rhythm and expression of the Sioux. The literary quality of Neihardt's book is readily apparent if one compares it to *The Sacred Pipe* by Joseph Epes Brown. Brown also interviewed Black Elk and the books cover much of the same ground, but the styles are very different. Neihardt's version vividly portrays the spirit and metaphor of the Lakota speaker. Brown's book, though very detailed and accurate, has none of the Native speaker's natural voice.

A far different type of book, but a very enjoyable one, is *Little Big Man* written by Thomas Berger in 1964. This book can be classified in the "It's not as bad as you might think" category. The book is written in the picaresque tradition. It is presented as fact instead of fiction. The author has created not only a fictional narrator, Jack Crabb, but also a fictional author, Ralph Fielding Snell (the Fielding is no doubt quite intentional). Within the time of some 80 years, our hero is passed back and forth among the Indians and the frontier towns. The book is filled with mistaken identities, bizarre characters, improbable events, and last minute rescues. Berger ridicules the stories of the Old West and the legendary characters of Wild Bill Hickok, Wyatt Earp and especially General George Armstrong Custer. The Indians, too, are shown in some rather absurd postures. They try to rope a locomotive while riding their ponies and have a tendency to kill each other when they get drunk. Little Big Man, alias Jack Crabb, is the central character who as a young boy was captured by a band of Cheyenne warriors. He is adopted by Old Lodge Skins, a Cheyenne chief who teaches him the ways of the "human beings." Though Old Lodge Skins recognizes that there are many more whites than Cheyennes, he is never willing to admit that the whites come any where near attaining the high standard of life led by the Cheyennes. Little Big Man tries to convince Old Lodge Skins to take his people far away from the white men but somehow they end up on the Little Big Horn River on June 25, 1876.

Few readers realize that the book, although absurd in many ways, is historically and culturally very accurate. Some parts, such as the Cavalry band playing "Gerry Owen" while the troops are slaughtering Indian women and children is, indeed, true. Berger did his homework on the Cheyenne. This novel is one of the few of its type in American Literature.

The Ugly category is reserved for *Hanto Yo!* by Ruth Beebe Hill, but could easily accommodate *The Memoirs of Chief Red Fox* and other hoaxes. What makes *Hanto Yo!* particularly reprehensible was the marketing technique and "hype" which preceded its publication. Billed as the "authentic story of three Dakota-Lakota families" in the period from 1750 to 1835, the book aroused a great deal of ire in Indian country, particularly among the Lakota of the Rosebud and the Pine Ridge reservations in South Dakota.

Like Berger, Hill invented an informant. While it was evidently clear to the reader that Jack Crabbe in Little Big Man was not a real person, Hill tried to

substantiate her claims for authenticity through the character of a man called Chunksa Yuha. While Berger used exaggeration for irony and humor, Hill's exaggerations and inventions were for vulgar sensationalism.

The publicity surrounding the release of Hanta Yo! was dramatic. The author claimed to have spent 30 years researching her book. She stated she spent 16 years learning the "Dakotah-Lakotah" dialect from Chunksa Yuha "the last survivor of eight Dakota boys who were taught the language, ritual, and songs by the tribe's old men." Working together, the two said they had translated her 2,000 page manuscript into Dakotah-Lakotah and then back into English using Webster's dictionary of 1805.

Lakota scholars all over the country were enraged, not only by the book itself, but also by the arrogance of the author. In a twenty-three page review, Victor Douville, Lakota Studies Department, Sinte Gleska College, Rosebud Reservation, destroyed Hill's claims for authenticity. Douville and other Lakotas could hardly believe that such a monumental hoax could be foisted upon the American people (Douville, 1980).

In the first place, Hill has a poor concept of the Lakota language. According to William K. Powers, an anthropologist who has studied on the Pine Ridge reservation for many years, Hill didn't even get the title correct.

> "Whenever native sentences are employed, they are ungrammatical or uncolloquial, as if they were pieced together from a dictionary rather than falling trippantly from a native speaker's tongue . . . . Even the title, which means "Clear the way," is inappropriate in the context of the book: it is employed as a philosophical statement which underscores for the author the fact that in archaic Indian society every individual was entitled to 'walk a straight path,' presumably meaning something like filling one's own existential shell. In this context the term "Hanto Yo" sounds absurd. If a person is in danger, one might warn him "Hanta Yo - Get out of the way!" If more than one person were addressed, one would say "Hanta Po!" (Powers, 1979:68-71).

Later Hill admitted she did not write a complete Lakota version, but translated important concepts and phrases into Lakota, researched the root meaning of each Lakota term, and then re-did the English version to fit (Time, May 5, 1980:98). The "research" sounds suspiciously like what Powers said about piecing the terms together from a dictionary - probably the dictionary of Lakota compiled by Father Buechel at the St. Francis Mission on the Rosebud reservation.

As for her informant, his real name is Lorenzo Blacksmith and he is the son of an Episcopal deacon. Blacksmith attended BIA schools from the time he was five until he was eighteen, the time he claims he was being told the tribal secrets. Hill met him through her Indian contacts in California - many of whom are dancers at Disneyland.

What is particularly annoying about the book is that Hill did, indeed, do

some research, or perhaps plagiarism is a more accurate term. Even though Hill stuck to her phoney story of native informants, Lakota scholars easily identified her sources: the Sun Dance from James Walker, "dreaming pairs" from Clark Wissler, and so on (Powers, 1979:69). Unfortunately, Hill transposed these descriptions over time and space to suit her own purposes. In reworking her sources to fit her own philosophy, Hill can certainly march right along side Longfellow, Cooper, et. al. Hill's philosophy of rugged individualism and existentialism is about as far away as one can get from the Lakota ideals of caring for one's relatives and promoting the welfare of the tribe.

One thing that all of these works by non-Indian writers have in common is that they somehow view themselves as doing something the Indian cannot do for himself. Indeed, as Vine Deloria pointed out in Custer Died for Your Sins, until fairly recently publishers believed that an Indian could not write a book and if he did it would be prejudiced in favor of the Indian. This is the same attitude held by the film producer who chose Robby Benson to portray Billy Mills, presumably because Indians can't act either. These books share something of the "revelation" syndrome. It is as though, quoting Vine Deloria again, every Indian is sitting and waiting for the first white man to stick his head into the tipi so the Indian can reveal to him all the tribal secrets.

NATIVE AMERICAN AUTHORS

American Indian Literature is coming to mean, for most people, the works of literature written in English by Native American authors. Novels by Native American authors are different from one another in some ways. Each novel presents a very specific view of a very specific place. Physical setting and cultural setting are extremely important in understanding the story. Even though there are unmistakably unique characteristics, there are also similarities. A number of the well-known novels by Native American authors are built around the common theme of alienation and cultural conflict. Novels in this category have characteristics of the "initiation story."

The basic tenet of the "initiation" theme is that a young man must at some time face up to the decision as to what he believes and how he intends to live. Confronting cultural conflict, in these stories, is an inevitable stage in becoming an adult. It can be put off, but it cannot be avoided altogether.

In most cases, the young hero is both attracted and repelled by his native culture. He is for some reason - usually because of mixed parentage - a fringe person living on the edge of his native culture. He is not a central figure in traditional beliefs and ceremonies. He generally forms a close relationship with an elder whom he trusts and admires, but he is well aware that the old way of life is passing. He has conflicts with the white world, usually in the form of run-ins with the law. For the most part, novels of this type are rather humorless, depressing, and offer little in the way of resolution. Once the trap is set, the hero almost seems doomed to play out his role with little chance of redemption. The cultural conflict is revealed and described, but seldom solved. At best, the hero learns to accept his fate and at worst, he dies.

One of the earliest, which has stood the test of time rather well, is The Surrounded by D'Arcy McNickle. First published in 1936, the novel tells the story of a young man, Archilde Leon, the son of a Spanish father and Indian mother, who returns to the Flathead Reservation in Montana after attending boarding school. He has no intention of staying on the reservation, but he is caught up in events he cannot escape. McNickle, who was a member of the Confederated Salish Kootenai tribe, was well known for his work as an historian, a scholar, and a politician. His book is historically and culturally authentic, and also very real and moving. It is interesting that even though the story takes place more than 50 years ago, it is essentially the same story of alienation and cultural conflict being told by contemporary writers.

Perhaps the most widely read Native American author today is N. Scott Momaday. A Kiowa Indian who spent his childhood on an Indian reservation in the Southwest, Momaday received his Ph.D. at Stanford University. He now teaches at the University of Arizona in Tucson. His novel, House Made of Dawn, received the Pulitzer Prize in 1969.

Momaday portrays the life of a young Indian named Abel from the years of 1949 to 1952. He moves restlessly from the Indian world on the reservation to the city of Los Angeles. He has ties to both worlds, but feels at home in neither. His search is for personal identity and a sense of belonging. He is alienated from his Indian identity by family and circumstances. "His father was a Navaho, they said, or a Sia, or an Isleta, an outsider anyway, which made him and his mother and Vidal somehow foreign and strange" (Momaday, 1969:15). His mother died when he was still a boy and then he had only his grandfather, Francisco. He went away from home for the first time when he went into the army. When he returned, he was not the same. At a festival in the village, he becomes involved in a struggle with an albino living with the Navahos. Later he kills the man, not because of what he has done to Abel, but because Abel believes him to be evil. He goes to prison, is released and goes to live in Los Angeles. He is a misfit in both places. Eventually, with the help of a medicine man, Abel finds the peace he is searching for.

Momaday effectively uses a number of literary devices. The story includes flashbacks to Abel's childhood which enrich the reader's understanding of the cultural fabric of his life. He also uses multiple narrators to show different points of view. Symbols of both worlds flow and intermingle throughout the novel. The Indian world is represented by the free flight of the golden eagles. The voice of the Indian speaks as the Priest of the Sun tells the old stories taught to him by his grandmother and as Benally chants the "House Made of Dawn." A literary scholar and skillful writer, Momaday effectively uses the Native American experience in a non-Native form.

In Leslie Silko's novel Ceremony, the main character, Tayo, is also of mixed parentage. He returns to his home on the Laguna Reservation after World War II. Tayo, too, must go through the stages of alienation, rejection, and finally reconcihation with his cultural heritage.

Unlike the previous novels where the characters find something of value in the culture, Jim Loney of James Welch's novel The Death of Jim Loney rejects

everything in both cultures. It is as though the confrontation has already taken place before the novel begins and Loney has given up. None of the efforts of his lover or family can save him. He is already doomed.

In another category of related novels, we have a broader sense of the importance of the family and the culture. These novels tend to present a view of the strength of the Native American experience as expressed through the family relationships. Love is the primary emotion. Although the books still contain a degree of alienation, the books are more self-centered. By self-centered, I mean that the conflicts arise from within the characters themselves and are not the result of Indian and non-Indian conflicts. The stories are more personal and individualistic and there is a great deal more humor.

In *Winter in the Blood,* James Welch has again presented a young man with a seemingly aimless existence. The narrator, who is given no name in the book, is powerless and listless - not because of what the white world has done to him, but because he has lost the two people he loved most in the world — his father and his brother. When his grandmother also dies, he feels even more adrift in an uncaring universe. His primary feeling is one of distance. Because the memory of the past is so painful, he tries to isolate himself from everyone and everything. In spite of its very serious theme, the book is very humorous in many scenes. The narrator learns that an old hermit living on the land near the ranch is really his grandfather. At that very moment that he learns of his true ancestry and the love of the old man for his grandmother, his old horse Bird lets go a fart. Welch is keenly aware of the irony in human existence - particularly the comic irony.

The knowledge that there is a connection to the old man seems to help him feel that there is a reason and purpose to life after all. In the end, he nearly kills himself, not out of despair, but trying to save the life of a cow, the very cow responsible for his brother's death. He has come to accept the power of the love he tried to deny and has made his reconciliation.

When asked why he doesn't include more of the ceremonial and traditional beliefs of his people in his books, Welch said, "For those people living on the reservations in that part of Montana, that's all there is. A few old people who remember a few events. That's all there is." He was then asked if it is enough and replied, "Yes" (Welch, 1986).

Louise Erdrich, a young women of Chippewa heritage, presents the experiences and relationships of a mixed blood family in her novel Love Medicine. The saga involves several generations of two families, the Kashpaws and the Lamartines, on the Turtle Mountain reservation in North Dakota. There is much that is tragic, and even horrifying, but there is also humor. Erdrich's characters are bound to one another by complex family relationships. Because they love each other so much, the tortures they inflict on one another are all the more painful. The theme of alienation from family, and then the reconciliation, is experienced by several of the characters.

Perhaps the most interesting and certainly the most complex work of Native American literature is N. Scott Momaday's The Way to Rainy Mountain. One is not sure that it is a novel at all. It has been variously classified as history,

anthropology, and folk-lore. Yet it is a story, not only of an individual family, but also of a tribe. The unique telling of the migration of the Kiowas from the mountains to the plains in the 1700's is more than a physical journey, it is a spiritual journey as well. It is not the cold, impersonal voice of the anthropologist or historian that speaks to us, but the warm and living voice of the people who lived the experience.

In these latter works, the authors have gone beyond the alienation and cultural conflict and looked at themselves as unique human beings. The humor and irony as well as the juxtaposition of events through time and space present a holistic vision of the Native experience.

In the second category, we have some very real characters caught up in some desperate, but still humorous, situations. These characters are not easily defeated. Unlike Leon in *The Surrounded* who honorably holds out his hands to receive the handcuffs, Gerry Nanapush in *Love Medicine* leads the police on a series of clashes and captures from the Pine Ridge reservation to Canada and back again. Even though he has spent most of his adult life in jail, he is still able to father numerous children by different mothers on his running tours through Indian country. Rather like a twentieth century Huckleberry Finn, Nanapush cannot seem to live within the confines of the civilized world.

Winter in the Blood, Love Medicine, and *The Way to Rainy Mountain* are not novels of cultural conflict. The clashes between the Indian and non-Indian are there, or course. But the characters are also living human beings responsible for their own actions and, in some cases, victims of their own foolishness. Both Erdrich and Momaday use multiple narrators. It is as if no one person can know the whole truth, The search for the truth is evident and earnest in all three novels.

The literature of the Native American writer has grown and matured considerably in the past fifty years. It is not an easy struggle. Not only must the writer overcome the persistent stereotypes of the "noble savage" of the previous century, he must also go beyond the "social misfit" and "cultural conflicts" of the present. He must achieve a mastery of non-Indian techniques and literary forms and, at the same time, maintain his Native voice and vision.

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