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Cherokee Medicine Man: The Life and Work of a Modern-Day Healer. By Robert J. Conley. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005. 160 pages. \$19.95 cloth.

This book is not for skeptics since it covers a topic quite unfamiliar to the Western mind—modern-day American Indian medicine. Robert J. Conley, renowned Cherokee author of thirty-five novels and other works of fiction and poetry, even states, “Many readers will find the tales told in this book to be fantastic, even outlandish” (148). Those familiar with American Indian cultures, however, know better. Recently I encountered the noted Cherokee artist Murv Jacob—whose two sketches nicely complement the text—in a restaurant in Tahlequah, nestled in the scenic foothills of the Ozark Plateau. When I informed him I was reviewing *Cherokee Medicine Man*, Jacob promptly stated that the book’s principal character, John Little Bear, “is the real McCoy.”

In *Cherokee Medicine Man*, Conley has set the tone for a new literary canon, one whose contributors face dire consequences for broaching a topic that is considered taboo, particularly with outsiders. Cherokee medicine men (Conley’s term)—and women—are famed for their knowledge of herbal medicines, but disclosing information about the ceremonial aspects of the practice is forbidden. Some have suggested that the untimely demise of Jack Kilpatrick—author of several books on the Cherokee, including *Run Toward the Night Land* (1967) and *Notebook of a Cherokee Shaman* (1970)—occurred because he violated the code of secrecy when he revealed information about sorcery. Another controversial book, *Someone Cry for the Children* (1981), coauthored by Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation officers Michael Wilkerson and Dick Wilkerson, also delved into the realm of conjuring, the dark side of Indian medicine. Collectively, these and other books are viewed unfavorably by many Cherokees. Aware of this context, Conley admits that his book should not have been written and that of all his publications, this one proved to be the most difficult to complete. So why did he publish this book? Because Little Bear sent messengers to Conley’s house and then approached and solicited him to write a book that would provide a “basic understanding” of present-day Indian medicine; believing in Indian medicine, Conley knew he could not ignore Little Bear’s request (7). Due to the extraordinary circumstances of its creation, Conley maintains, “This may be one of the most important books I’ve ever written” (147).

One compelling and unexplained facet of the book is that Little Bear, a pseudonym, is depicted in the book’s only photograph. Like shamans around the world, he comes from a line of magico-religious healers, or “doctors.” His maternal grandmother—an amazing 115 years old—and great-grandfather were also medicine persons. At a very early age, Little Bear “could see into the future” and learned that he was born with “a veil over his entire body,” associated with his clairvoyant powers (43). Before Little Bear solicited Conley to write the book, he informed him that he was drinking too much whiskey: “I been watching you. I want you to cut way back. I seen your liver, and it has a white line around it” (4). Sitting at home and sipping coffee several nights later, Conley “looked wistfully at the nearly full bottle of Wild Turkey” and then

espied “a shadow move across the window outside in the darkness” (4). He asks, “Little Bear, is that you? Goddamn it, I’m drinking coffee” (4). Arriving home shortly afterward, Conley’s wife reported that a large owl had flown in front of her. Conley replied, “Hell, it was Little Bear” (4). Several months later, Little Bear hailed Conley in a Tahlequah parking lot and requested that he come for a visit. During the subsequent consultation, Little Bear issued a warning: “I seen you walking across that parking lot, and there was part of you walking along ten feet behind you” (6). As a shapeshifter assuming the guise of different animals, Little Bear has the ability to keep track of “everyone he makes medicine for” (4). His vigilant watch over Conley resulted in the production of this book.

Drawing upon his vast knowledge of Cherokee ethnohistory and using James Mooney’s *Myths of the Cherokee* (1897–98) and *Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees* (1891), Conley devotes chapter 1 to a thumbnail sketch of Cherokee culture and the magico-religious beliefs that originated in the American Southeast and were brought to northeastern Oklahoma in the early nineteenth century. Cherokee mythology tells of a council of animals that sought vengeance against the Ani-yunwiya, “the Principal People,” by sending various diseases and how the plants then convened to provide cures for each disease. Since time immemorial, Cherokee medicine persons have been guided by the animistic spirits of plants to learn how to treat various illnesses. Moreover, because diseases originated from the desire for revenge, many of the problems contemporary Cherokees face stem from “jealous or disgruntled people” who consult “makers of bad medicine.” Hence “shooting magic” is used to bring about financial, physical, or mental suffering. Doctors such as Little Bear are consulted to counter the effects of bad medicine (18).

Informal interviews with Little Bear’s clientele, described in concise case studies, are found in chapters 5 through 42. On most days, visitors to the Little Bear home on Stick Ross Mountain might see Indians, whites, blacks, and Mexicans from Oklahoma and adjacent states waiting to see Little Bear or to participate in sweat lodge ceremonies conducted by Frank, his assistant. Those with problems wait even longer while Little Bear makes medicine inside his house and returns with altered tobacco—unfiltered cigarettes infused with medicine—and instructions how to use it. Unlike Western medicine, which emphasizes the alleviation of symptoms, Indian medicine addresses their underlying causes. Presenting the “fixed tobacco” to a client, Little Bear reveals the source of the problem, which he tries to reverse by “blocking” the bad medicine. Since jealous individuals often hire younger, aspiring medicine people to send bad medicine to their adversaries, one must be careful when accepting doctored gifts.

One can’t learn medicine powers overnight; it is a lifelong process. Little Bear, perhaps in his mid-to-late sixties, did not run his own sweat lodge until he was forty-five, and he began to doctor around the age of fifty. Recently Little Bear has emerged as one of the more powerful medicine persons in eastern Oklahoma, primarily because of his success in blocking bad medicine sent to him by rival shamans; like other Indian doctors in the area, his life is a constant struggle to thwart malign magic, which has hospitalized him in the

past. According to Little Bear, the strength of his medicine is related to the power of his prayers to the spirit world. When Conley witnessed the purification rite, “going to water,” the whispered incantations were in the Cherokee language, yet another source of medicine power.

Years ago when I accepted a teaching job in Tahlequah, some of my Kiowa friends informed me that the Cherokee had “lost their culture.” I intend no disrespect toward my friends in southwestern Oklahoma, but they were wrong—very wrong. Even though outsiders consider Cherokees to be “assimilated,” they quietly go about their business maintaining ancient traditions, including indigenous medical systems. Since August 1992, I have gradually learned that Cherokee culture is deeply rooted in age-old wisdom, a wisdom that is beautifully represented in *Cherokee Medicine Man*.

One final note—believers in Little Bear’s medicine powers say that his remade tobacco brings good luck. I wonder if someone could set him up with the Chicago Cubs?

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The Cherokee Nation: A History. By Robert J. Conley. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005. 279 pages. \$24.95 cloth.

Robert J. Conley’s latest book is a survey of Cherokee history from its tribal origins to the present. It is an official history of sorts, the result of an invitation to Conley from the Cherokee government during Wilma Mankiller’s time as principal chief. Like most survey histories, it is somewhat light on analysis, and Conley, who has spent a long career considering the Cherokee past, clearly has much more to say. Nonetheless, it is a useful book. Short, clearly written, and accessible to nonspecialists, it deserves to become the starting point for general readers interested in the subject.

The Cherokee Nation focuses on political history, examining the subjects typical of Indian relations literature. Conley discusses colonial-era trade and diplomacy, the Cherokees’ part in the American Revolution, and their early relations with the United States. He describes the emergence of the Cherokee republic in the early nineteenth century and the fight to avoid Removal. In the chapters covering the Removal era, he ably weaves together an account of the Cherokee Nation’s resistance with the lesser-known stories of Cherokees who had already gone west to form communities in Arkansas and Texas. Although the emphasis is on political and military affairs, there is some discussion of Cherokee cultural change in the first half of the book. Conley pauses, for example, to summarize the effects of the colonial trade on Cherokee ways, and later he raises the question of the influence of intermarried whites on Cherokee life in the early nineteenth century.

Each chapter concludes with a glossary and a list of sources and suggested readings. The first two items are quite valuable as indices of place names and the names of tribal leaders. Some of the reading lists, however, are