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Book Reviews

American Indian Literature: An Anthology. Edited by Alan R. Velie. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979. 356 pp. pap. \$6.95.

The appearance of Velie's new paperback anthology of American Indian literature attests to the continuing vitality of the field and also to the inadequacies of previous anthologies, the best known and most readily available of which are *The Portable North American Indian Reader*, Frederick W. Turner III, ed. (New York: Viking, 1973; paperback, 628 pages); *Literature of the American Indian*, Thomas E. Sanders and Walter W. Peek, eds. (Beverly Hills: Glencoe, 1973; hardback, 534 pages); and *American Indian Prose and Poetry: We Wait in the Darkness*, Gloria Levitas, Frank R. Vivelo, and Jacqueline J. Vivelo, eds. (New York: Putnam, 1974; paperback, 325 pages). Each of these four anthologies can be called comprehensive in that it includes examples of all the genres of Indian literature—myth, tale, song, memoirs, oratory, modern poetry, and modern fiction. The fact that there is so little duplication of selections among them demonstrates the wealth of material in the field. A quick check of my book shelves turns up some twenty-five additional paperback anthologies which are not comprehensive, being limited to just one or two genres (e.g., traditional poetry, tales, modern fiction, etc.) or to a single culture-group or tribe (e.g., the Plains Indians, the Kiowas, etc.). But great gaps still remain in what is available in modern editions.

If the other comprehensive anthologies are inadequate, it is because of the difficulty of encompassing so great a wealth of material in the space of a single volume. Inevitably, to select only two or three creation myths from the great number which have been preserved or to include only eight modern poets when there are many more who equally deserve recognition is to distort the reader's view of the field. But this is a problem inherent in the genre, and it is minor compared to the positive contributions anthologies make toward enlarging our knowledge of the literature and increasing our understanding of traditional and contemporary Native American life.

In this context, Velie's anthology suffers from the limitations to which all anthologies are subject, but often it suffers to a seemingly needless

degree. For example, only sixteen tribes, chiefly the Plains tribes, are represented in his selections, so the geographical distribution and cultural diversity of his coverage are severely limited. And, despite the many excellent works by Indian women, not a single one appears anywhere in the anthology. These omissions, to me at least, are inexplicable in an anthology which purports to cover the field of American Indian literature.

Another puzzling aspect of Velie's editing is his wasteful use of space. He devotes forty pages to the *Walam Olum*, the painted record of the creation myth and tribal history of the Delawares; here he includes both pictographs and a Delaware text, giving the English translation on the opposite page. Although the pictographs and Delaware text are probably at least momentarily interesting to the general reader, it is doubtful that many will do more than hurriedly scan them, concentrating instead on the translation. If given in reduced print, the Delaware text could have been interlineated, thus saving twenty pages for the inclusion of additional material. Similarly, another forty pages are devoted to songs and their musical scores, the scores taking up more than half the space. A few representative scores are welcome, but it is unnecessary to have the scores of all thirty-three songs. Here, another twenty pages could have been saved with no significant loss to the reader. Further, such material as the Delaware text and the musical scores may well be of value to the specialist but, as most teachers will have come to recognize, it may also appear so highly technical and forbidding that it frightens off the already gunshy beginners, the very ones to whom an anthology such as Velie's should appeal. If such material is to be included, it should be done as unobtrusively and economically as possible, not highlighted as is here the case.

Velie also indulges in the dubious practice of including excerpts from well-known, easily obtainable books. Although he does so with admitted misgivings, hoping to encourage his readers to "get the books and read them in their entirety," this practice should be avoided for at least three reasons: it is aesthetically questionable, it could just as likely discourage reading the entire work because the reader feels he already knows what it is about, and, if the anthology is to be used in the classroom, it may well preempt materials which the teacher would rather assign in their entirety. This is especially true of Velie's use of excerpts from such popular books as *Black Elk Speaks*, *Lame Deer*, *Seeker of Visions*, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, *Winter in the Blood*, and *House Made of Dawn*. The advantages of excerpting outweigh the disadvantages only when it is done from works which are significant but hard to find or not well-known—works like *Wah'Kon-Tah* (an excerpt from which Velie also includes), *Son of Old Man Hat*, *Miracle Hill*, *Sun Chief*, etc., but Velie's excerpts from readily available works take up some eighty pages of the anthology, pages which could have been better devoted to expanding the number of

short stories, contemporary poems, and myths, and to excerpting obscure works, so as to gain more diverse cultural coverage, to include some of the fine American Indian women writers, and to draw attention to less well-known but deserving works.

A further troubling aspect of Velie's anthology is its rather obvious Oklahoma bias. For example, of the eight contemporary poets represented, five were either born in or attended a university in Oklahoma. This, plus the almost exclusive concentration on authors and materials from the Plains and closely related culture groups, makes the book far from representative of the diversity of the field and invalidates the claim, implicit in its title and explicit in the back-cover blurb, that "this anthology presents the richness of Native American literature . . ."

However, Velie's anthology does draw together materials not available in the other comprehensive anthologies; in addition, its orientation is more specifically literary than those of the other three books. The orientation of the *Portable North American Indian Reader* is historical, that of *American Indian Prose and Poetry* anthropological, and that of *Literature of the American Indian* militantly political. Velie is surely on sounder ground when he says that the selections in his book "are presented as serious literature to be judged as literature. They are not being presented as quaint relics of a forgotten people or as ethnic curiosities." However, his introduction and headnotes fail to provide as much as this seems to promise in the way of a literary context for understanding the works. Like the other anthologists, he does provide useful historical and anthropological information and additionally, from time to time, makes an apt literary comparison, but finally falls short of giving the reader the kind of comparative and analytical introduction that would illuminate the unique qualities of the literature as well as point out its universal themes and formal characteristics. Perhaps it is unfair to hold this against Velie since the study of American Indian literature *qua* literature must be regarded as being yet in its infancy; nevertheless, it is hard to avoid disappointment that he went no further in this direction than he did. As Velie says, Indian literature was "the first American literature, and much of it ranks with the best any Americans have produced." Still, the day seems far off that it will be read, as British literature for example is now read, primarily because it is great literature instead of primarily because it is Indian literature, and a more thoughtful and informed approach to it as literature is desperately needed if the day is to be hastened.

So, while this anthology does not supersede the other comprehensive anthologies, it does complement them by providing additional materials and by at least drawing attention to the fact that, in order to establish itself as a viable and permanent area of literary study, American Indian literature should be judged, as Velie says, by the same criteria as any

other literature: "Does it deal with an important subject? Does it handle its subject in an intelligent, complex manner? Is it well executed—that is, is language used skillfully?" The principle virtue of Velie's anthology is that its selections fare very well when judged by these criteria.

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Hopitutuwutsi: Hopi Tales. A Bilingual Collection of Hopi Indian Stories. By Ekkehart Malotki. Flagstaff: Museum of Northern Arizona Press, 1978. 213 pp. \$11.50.

Almost a century ago Natalie Curtis traveled to northern Arizona in order to talk with Lololomai, embattled leader of the Hopi village of Oraibi. Curtis was working on a book, and she wanted to include some Hopi oral literature in it. She reports her meeting with Lololomai in *The Indians' Book* (1907). "Hopi children are going to school; they are learning new ways and are singing new songs—American songs instead of Hopi . . . these little ones will never sing the songs of their fathers." Still there's hope, she assures the Hopi leader, "there is one thing in the school good for all to have and to know, and that is books. As yet your people have no books nor do they read or write. That is why your songs will be forgotten, why even your language may some day pass away Until the time shall come when the Hopis shall themselves record their stories and their songs, some one must do this for them, else much will be lost—lost forever, like a wind-blown trail. So I have come from my far-distant home by the 'great waters' in the East to write the Hopi songs." Curtis reports that Lololomai punctuated her proposal with nods of agreement and an occasional pathetic turn. Then he sang her a song and spent most of the day helping her transcribe and translate it. As the sun set, Curtis mused "the chief's song was that sung when the corn was garnered. And I with book and pencil I was gleaning in the Hopi fields in this the sunset hour of the people's native life. The time is short before night shall fall forever on the spirit of spontaneous song within the Indian."

There is much to notice here from the vantage of a new collection of Hopi verbal art and another era of appreciating American Indian story and song. Consider first the pattern of the whole affair for it follows a script that literally thousands of others have acted out in similar circumstances. There is the approach, in which the non-Indian investigator arrives with the assumptions that Indian cultures are dying and that the printed word must replace the spoken one if there is to be any hope of